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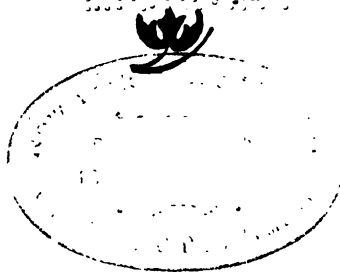
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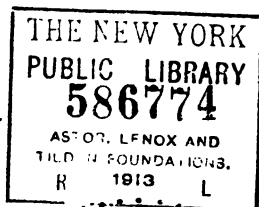
LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN

A STUDY
IN TEMPTATIONS
AND
A BUNDLE OF LIFE

BY JOHN OLIVER HOBBS pseud
of P.M.T.R. Craigie



London
T. FISHER UNWIN
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"A Study in Temptations" was first published in 1893, and was reprinted in that year (three times), in 1901, in 1905, and in 1906.

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To A.

DESIDERIUM ANIMÆ EJUS TRIBUISTI EI

DOMINE, ET VOLUNTATE LABIORUM

EJUS NON FRAUDASTI EUM.

VITAM PETIIT A TE, ET TRIBUISTI EI

LONGITUDINEM DIERUM IN

SÆCULUM. INCURRI.

February 7th, 1892.

"IN order to judge whether what is said or done by any character be well or ill, we are not to consider that speech or action alone, whether in itself it be good or bad, but also by whom it is spoken or done, to whom, at what time, in what manner, or for what end. . . .

"To opinion, ~~of what is commonly~~ said to be, may be referred even such things ~~as are~~ improbable and absurd ; and it may also be said, that events of that kind are, sometimes, not really improbable ; since, 'it is probable that many things should happen contrary to probability.'—
ARISTOT., *Poet.*

PROPERTY OF THE
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A Study in Temptations.

PROLOGUE.

WHICH CONTAINS ALL THE TRAGEDY OF THE BOOK.

"MARY CECILIA, aged seventeen, with whom lies buried all the hope, all the belief in God and goodness of her husband, Charles Sydney Fenyns."

The grave-digger who spelled out this inscription on the coffin, nudged his companion, and they clambered up the sides of the grave to stare after a man, who, with dragging steps and bent head, was slowly groping his way out of the cemetery. He avoided the path, and slunk round and among the numerous mounds and monuments, frequently stumbling, and often halting outright.

"Did you see 'is face?" said the elder of the grave-diggers; "'e ain't a day more'n two-and-twenty. 'Tain't every one as marries so fool'ardy young as gits out of it so easy!"

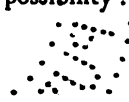
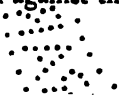
His assistant, less philosophical but more kindly, blinked his eyes and gave a cheerless laugh. "'E prob'ly thinks," he said, "as 'e's the 'ardest done-by in the 'ole world. 'E don't see as it all stands to reason, as you and me do, bless yer. 'E only thinks as when 'e gits 'ome there won't be nobody there."

"I knows some," said his senior, with a grim smile, "as 'ud thank the Almighty if they could go 'ome and find the 'ouse empty! *They* wouldn't say nothink agin the goodness of Gord, *they* wouldn't. *They* wouldn't be writin' none of this 'ere. *They* would be foldin' their 'ands and sayin' as Gord's will is for the best, and be-yaving theirselves like Christians!"

Then they resumed their work, and in working forgot to moralize.

The object of their remarks, meanwhile, having refused to drive home in the solitary mourning coach which with the hearse had formed the funeral procession, found his strength so unequal to the task of walking, that he sank on a bench outside a public-house, which stood conveniently near the entrance to the cemetery. He was, as the grave-digger had observed, quite young and certainly not more than two-and-twenty. He was tall, but somewhat bent—not that he stooped, there was rather a leaning forward of his whole body. His brilliant eyes seemed to have burnt deep into their sockets, and they cast a flickering light on the pallor of his cheeks, which looked the more pale in contrast with his dark hair.

He was at an early stage of grief, and he felt as though he were two beings—one, speechless and stricken; the other, a mere spectator, who philosophized, and mocked, and wept, and laughed by starts and was only constant in watching. That he was sorrowful, he guessed—but what was sorrow? He knew that he had loved—yet what was love? He lived—and what was life? Mary was dead. Immortality might be, but she once was. O lovely fact to weigh against the ghost-like possibility!



To whatever end his thoughts were tending (and the way was broad), they were diverted, for the moment at least, by the potman, who, moved by compassion, or following his invariable custom in dealing with mourners, came out to tell him that there was a private room within, where he would find a fire, writing materials, and the daily papers. Jenyns, to his own amazement, but as the potman had foreseen, acted on the hint and followed him into a small, musty room which barely atoned for its stale odour, its dismal light, and oppressive warmth, by being empty. The potman poked the fire, smoothed out the *Sportsman*, stirred the ink with the one quill in the pen-tray, and, while thus exercising his hands, had his eyes and his wits concentrated on the mysterious and melancholy wayfarer.

The interest Jenyns had created in the minds of the grave-diggers, was slight compared with the sensation he had unconsciously produced among the patrons of the "Jolly Nell." (The original sign had been the "Jolly Knell," but this having been repudiated by the present proprietor—an Irishman—as Dutch spelling, the *K* was painted out.) Jenyns's bearing, appearance and expression were so unusual, and his features so handsome, that had the same gossips met him under the most commonplace conditions, they would still have paused to guess his calling, or to wonder what path lay before him. On this occasion, however, the despair on his countenance, the possible romance connected with it, and the unlikeness between himself and the mean—almost abject—circumstances of the funeral, gave him a prominence far greater, than if he had buried his dead with every elegant sign of still more elegant grief.

As the landlady pointed out, had he been really poor, he would have driven home in the carriage—a poor man could not afford to miss such chances; further, he would not have been alone, for his family, or at least his neighbours, would have seized the opportunity for a breath of fresh air and a nice change: they would have made it, in fact, a chastened holiday-jaub. She did not use that particular phrase, but her nod was to that effect. Her crowning observation that he was a student, or something of that, who had got some young woman into trouble, and the poor thing had died of a broken heart, and he was being eat up by remorse, was made in a whisper so thrilling, that it pierced through the thin door and reached Jenyns's sensitive ear. He waited to hear no more, but leaving half-a-crown (his last) on the table, walked so quickly and noiselessly out of the house, that the group in the bar-room, who were so eagerly discussing him, did not notice his departure.

Once on the main road, he seemed to gain a certain composure and his strength of limb; he walked hurriedly and was, in fact, racing against the thoughts which threatened every moment to outstrip and overcome him. When he finally halted it was nearly evening, and he had reached a dingy dwelling in one of the streets near King's Cross. The neighbourhood was poor and the door of the house stood open—as doors may, when there is little to offer friends and nothing to tempt the thieving.

A small boy and his mother stood by the area railings, and they both looked after Jenyns as he passed in.

"Mother," said the boy, tugging at the woman's

apron—"mother, next time a lodger dies may I have another half-holiday?"

Jenyns heard the question, and, smiling faintly, walked slowly up the creaking staircase till he reached a room on the fourth landing. He crept in and gazed stupidly around it: noticed that there was a cupboard door half-open, a few medicine bottles on the mantelpiece, a pile of women's garments on a chair, a white straw hat, trimmed with ribbons, on the chest of drawers. Inch by inch his eyes travelled from the chair to the table, from the table to the floor, from the floor to a pair of small, muddy shoes with ridiculous French heels, from the shoes to the bed, and there, as it seemed to him, he saw her lying as she had been for two days past, before they lifted her into the coffin.

"God! O God!" he called.

But no God answered.

He bent over the imaginary form. "Wake up!" he whispered—"wake up! You are dreaming, that's all. You have often dreamt before. Wake up! Mary! Mary! are you so tired?"

Outside the house he heard a rustling, a strange shrieking and wailing. Was it *all* the wind? It seemed to the half-crazed man a Presence—a host of Presences swarming in at the windows, down the chimney, and gathering round him.

"I do not fear you," he said; "there is no worse torment than living. Where you are, Hell must be, and you are everywhere. Pain is nothing; everything is nothing; You are nothing. But—damn you—I will believe in you if you can wake"—he pointed to the empty bed—"if you can wake *one of us*."

"I cannot," said a sorrowful voice. Jenyns rubbed his eyes, and burst out laughing.

"Oh, is it only you, Wrath?" he said. "What a fool I am; I thought you were the devil."

The man he addressed, and who had followed him into the room unperceived, was of middle height and extraordinarily thin: his features and form looked misty and ill-defined, though he stood behind a cloud and were trying to pierce through it.

"Would you have your wife live again that she may die again?" he said, quietly—"that you may bury her again?"

"No, no," muttered Jenyns—"no, no, not *this* again. A jump from the window or a prick at my throat would settle my mind for ever. If there *is* a hereafter I would know it, and if there isn't—well, I could not feel the disappointment. Clay has no illusions to lose. You see," he added, "I have not called up the devil for nothing!"

Jenyns's idea of religion—picked from street-corners and Ingersoll—began and ended with the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. When he was happy and thought himself an enlightened believer in the possibility of a Supreme Reason, he forgot it; when he was in trouble, he could think of nothing else. Sometimes it filled him with panic, sometimes with desperation: more often than all with a longing to be in the Place of Torment—to know the worst, to put an end to the torturing suspense and doubt.

"If the devil can answer your curses," said Wrath, "why not try whether God will answer prayers?"

"Cursing is quick," said Jenyns, "and prayers are

long. Call Satan but under your breath and he comes. But God—you may wear out your knees and your voice before He will answer, and then He will give you not peace but a sword, not ease but a thorn in the flesh, not love but chastisements! The greater the saint, the thicker the scourge! Where's the fool who would pray day and night for such blessings? Have I not grief enough and despair enough but I must entreat for more?"

Wrath groaned. "Human nature is so discontented!" he said: "I have been starving for a month, and I must own that this constant gnawing at one's vitals becomes tedious: I would prefer a newer pain."

"Let us both pray for another sort of anguish," said Jenyns, "the good old monks were artistic: they believed that variety was beauty, so they occasionally skinned a heretic before they boiled him!"

Wrath accepted this as a sign of returning cheerfulness. "The story runs so well," he said, "I will not be pedantic and press for your authority. But it sounds like an evangelical tract." He rose from his seat and began to pace the floor. Life to him was a pilgrimage, and the fortunes and misfortunes of the journey troubled him but a little; he could not understand despair. "Perhaps you are best alone," he said; "my mother used to say that to be alone with grief was to live in company with angels. I think she knew; she had a great deal to endure. If I sell my picture we can run over to Venice together; I mean, of course, if you would care to go with me. . . . I do not wonder this room is gloomy; it has stolen the odour of a dozen honest dinners. Let us go down in the kitchen and see the baby. I sketched her this

morning ; here it is : 'Study of an Infant Genius : aged four days.'

"Don't talk of her," said Jenyns, fiercely ; "I never wish to look upon her face again. She killed her mother. . . . I see no God in nature—only Hell, cruel, relentless, hideous."

"Bah !" said Wrath. "Don't get your nose in an artificial manure heap and think you are studying nature. If you take Zola for your gospel and the gospel for fiction, God must help you. I cannot. Where is your spirit ?"

"I do not want to be a hero," said Jenyns, sullenly, "or a saint ; I want my wife."

"Heroes and husbands are made by the occasion," said Wrath ; "no one is born a husband and no one is born a pious, homicidal hero ! At first he is just man—man with a birthright of seven deadly sins and one small conscience. There never was a saint, you may rest perfectly sure, but he might have fallen twenty times a day, if he had not fought the enemy with fine courage. Why don't you howl because the trees are bare ? Who would think that such grim skeletons could ever be bright with leaves again, or look just as they did last year ? Yet they will ; and so, when the time comes, you will see your wife ; you have only buried the dead leaves of a soul." At no time an eloquent man but always one to whom speech was even a painful effort, he went out of the room after this outburst. With the inconsequence of the artistic reason he had a sudden idea for a picture he was then designing.

Jenyns was once more alone. He gave a feeble laugh and hurried to the window ; it was open ; he

looked down and shivered. Then he looked up at the dark sky.

"God," he said, "if you are there, and if you know everything, you must be sorry for me."

He climbed up on the sill, held out his arms, and with a sob leapt into the night and eternity.

A second later Wrath re-entered. He was breathless, and was reading a letter.

"Now admit," he said, "there *is* a God who answers prayers. We can go to Venice. Tooth has sold my 'Antigone.' Three hundred——"

His only answer was a shout of horror, a hum of voices, a sound of hurrying in the street below. He leaned out of the window and understood the confusion.

"*Mater Dei!*" he cried. "Ah, don't groan! Lift him gently! Take care! Five pounds—twenty—to the man who is quickest with the doctor!"

A man looked up from the crowd. "I should like to see the five pound *fast*," he said. A faint titter greeted his wisdom; an old woman sobbed.

"Come away!" said a girl, who was hanging on the arm of her sweetheart; "there is always something to spoil my evening out!"

The titter and the sob, the sweetheart's retreating footsteps, and Jenyns's death moan, each gave their note to the great unceasing murmur of the city.

I.

UP-AT-BATTLE'S.

THE family of Drawne was not distinguished till the time of the Reformation, when one Richard Drawne was rewarded for his holy zeal in the suppression of monasteries, by a large grant of confiscated church property, including the Abbey of St. Wilfred, with the manor-house, monastery and demesne lands of the same, amounting to four thousand three hundred acres. He did not live long to enjoy his honours, but died of a fever, leaving his daughter, Anne, sole heiress. In the reign of Edward VI. this lady married the Earl of Warbeck, and thus brought her great wealth to that ancient house which had become sadly impoverished for various but uninteresting causes. The heiress, however, was very tenacious of her female right, and left no legal loopholes by which her property could become one with the Warbeck peerage: the Drawne acres were an inheritance past comparison with any empty earldom. But during three centuries of struggle and change which followed, male heirs in direct succession never failed, and the Earls of Warbeck, by innocently anticipating the miraculous policy of the Vicar of Bray, not only held their possessions, but escaped the inconvenient glories of persecution and martyrdom.

At the time of our story, Henry Fitzgerald George

Vandeleur Shannon was 15th Earl of Warbeck, and one Jane Shannon stood in the inconsiderable relation of niece to his lordship. Jane's father had been the fourth son of the late Earl—a kinship in itself sufficiently contemptible from the standpoint of the heir, but when the said fourth son married the daughter of a yeoman-farmer, he lost even the small right he had to twinkle in the Warbeck heaven, and was considered—not a fallen star, but no star at all.

Since the object of such just indignation and scorn was unable to earn his own bread (from the fact, no doubt, that he had half-killed himself writing a Prize Essay—"De Labore"), he lived on the charity of his yeoman father-in-law till, as he himself expressed it, he left a world where he was not wanted, to abide with that sleek host, the worm. In other words, he died of his own grim humour, assisted by a certain difficulty in breathing, a trouble in his liver, a pain in his head, and a grip at his left side. His wife, who was with child at the time of his death, postponed breaking her heart till she had brought forth her little one, and then she turned her sad face to the wall, and died also. The care of the child thus fell to the yeoman-farmer, who, by this time, may be said to have some claim on the reader's sympathy.

Samuel Battle—such was his name—came of sound stock. One John Battle and Matthew his brother had fought under Cromwell. Their descendants, under the Restoration, had, with two exceptions, abandoned the field of war for the more tranquil, if less conspicuous, honours of farming. Of the exceptions, one was a certain Anthony, a scholar and wit, who wrote some love verses and a comedy (composi-

tions, which, dying to posterity, had left their reputation like some unhallowed spirit to haunt the family conscience); the other, Nicholas, was one of the some two thousand clergy who were expelled from their parishes for Nonconformity in 1662. It was from this Nicholas that Samuel Battle, the yeoman-farmer, took his descent. Jane Shannon was heiress, therefore, to many conflicting dispositions.

Battle's farm, or, as it was known in the district, "Up-at-Battle's," lay some eight miles to the east of Brentmore, a small watering-place in the south of England, noted for its scenery, its climate, and the sleep-bringing mission of its air. The farm-house was unpretentious, and though presenting to a town-trained eye an appearance of picturesque antiquity, it was, in fact, an extremely ugly cottage of the Victoria era, made to look rambling and picturesque by means of the numerous rooms, store-cupboards, and outhouses added to it during Battle's own lifetime. The property, when he first came into possession, had consisted of pasture-land, a small orchard, and a large yard. The greater part of the original homestead (built about 1700) had been destroyed by fire, and Battle's father, acting on the advice of a young and second wife, had completed the work of destruction, by building on its ruins the aforesaid Victorian cottage. An unkind rumour had it, that what remained of the best parlour of the first Mrs. Battle, could now be recognised in the most retired portion of the dwelling.

Samuel Battle, on coming into his inheritance, was not slow to show himself a man of singular energy, perseverance, and shrewdness: he was quick to see

that letting land was more profitable than tilling it. He was also in favour of small plots and short leases—the advantages of which, as he was careful to point out to dubious tenants, cut both ways, although they might occasionally cut a bit deeper on one side than on the other. An enigmatic saying, which time and the increasing value of the ground made clear.

His education, culled as it was from the Scriptures, and guiltless of School Board trimmings, gave him a command of language, a stern dignity and sterner refinement, than could be found now in younger men of his station, who too often talk big words from their favourite newspaper, mistake insolence for independence, and swagger for good breeding. Dr. Johnson's saying that "the Devil was the first Whig" was the first article of Battle's political belief, and, a staunch Nonconformist, he so far availed himself of the right of private judgment that where his co-religionists read "*Down with authority*," he only discovered exhortations to obedience. He was, therefore, a Tory, but for no other reason than because he did not see how a professed Christian could be anything else. From which it would seem that if Samuel Battle did wrong he did it rightly.

At the time of which we write, the inmates of the farm-house numbered four, and were Battle himself, his spinster daughter Miss Caroline, his one grandchild Jane Shannon, and a young boy named De Boys Mauden, who was his nephew by marriage—a relative as distant as he was poor.

Jane was three years younger than De Boys, and when he first came to the farm-house, he was seven, and she, four. He was handsome, but she was a plain

little creature, all eyes and legs, though the eyes had fire, and the legs were shapely.

This child as she grew up was taught to read and write, to add figures, to make butter and jam, to do plain sewing, and to work hideous patterns with Berlin wool on blue canvas. When she was nine, she was sent to a day-school, and had lessons in drawing, French, and music, and her education, on the whole, was no less thorough than that of many young ladies of fashion. She could write, "The gardener's wife has two children" in a foreign language, and she, too, in the course of time strummed Heller's "Tarentella," the "Moonlight" sonata, and Chopin's Valses. She played them to De Boys long before he had learnt the manners to listen.

She was brought up as a Dissenter, but her father had been a devout Catholic, and it had been promised that when she arrived at years of discretion, she would be given every opportunity to hear the claims of Catholicism. In the meantime, however, no pains were spared to warn her against Antichrist, the Mother of harlots, and idolatry; for the wives and daughters of the deacons thought it a terrible sign of more iniquitous practices to come, when it was known that she cherished her dead father's rosary and crucifix.

Jane's instructor in the useful arts, such as mending, darning, patchwork, and the like, was her aunt, Miss Caroline. Miss Caroline Battle was what men call a sensible woman, which is a way of saying that she did not attach too much weight to their smiles, although she could always smile in her turn. She was comely, too, with soft brown eyes and a pillow-

like figure, which counteracted the occasional sharpness of her tongue. Miss Caroline, like happy Peter Bell, beheld but did not speculate: she tended her garden, watched the stars, and read two chapters of Scripture every night of her life. She kept hens, and ducks, and bees, and her butter was the pride of the country. She possessed a Maltese lace shawl, and an illustrated Shakespeare, also a set of Whitby jet ornaments, and an amethyst brooch. These treasures, however, she kept locked in her wardrobe because they were heirlooms, and as such were treasured in silver paper. For light literature she gave Jane "The Pilgrim's Progress," "Lady Audley's Secret," "Amy Herbert," "Paul and Virginia," "Roderick Random," "Æsop's Fables," "Robinson Crusoe," and, on Sunday afternoons and anniversaries, Dante's "Inferno," illustrated by Dorè. The horrors of this last, while they struck misery to Jane's soul, were largely mitigated by the story of Francesca de Rimini, which, Miss Caroline thought, could only be edifying, since, from all she could gather, the whole Rimini family were in Hell, and burning examples of foreign immorality and its just reward. Why so gentle a being as Caroline Battle should take satisfaction, so deep-reaching that it amounted to pleasure, in a tale which for exciting pity and terror is hardly to be matched, can only be accounted for on the ground, that Hell and sin, as actualities, were so impossible to her imagination, that she believed in one and disapproved of the other as a child swallows medicine, and "hates" porridge.

To Jane, however, whose character was of a very different cast—for she saw everything through the

rainbow haze of her own moods—the idea of being damned for love became so familiar and so fascinating, that to love *without* losing one's soul (if, indeed, such a thing were possible), seemed to her dull, spiritless, monotonous, and bumpkin like. To marry, to settle, to grow stout, and at the last to be "*Jane, wife of the above, aged 74. Until the day break and the shadows flee away.*" Unthinkable prospect! But to float in the air through countless ages—a sight to inspire poets and make them swoon—that were a destiny worthy the name! She confided this opinion to De Boys, who agreed that it would be fine to swim in the winds; but he thought that a girl hanging on his neck would mar the gloriousness of the excursion. Such is the brutality of man at fourteen.

Quite early De Boys had shown a taste for learning, and had dreams very far removed from the walls, turnip-fields, and potato-beds of Up-at-Battle's. He held very pronounced views on literary style, and wrote numerous sermons in the manner of Gibbon, which Jane considered far superior to anything achieved by that historian himself. In gayer moments he attempted blank verse (in the Miltonic strain), and composed two acts of a tragedy—"Julius Cæsar in Britain"—in which Jane declared that Julius Cæsar sounded exactly like De Boys, particularly in a fine speech about women, which began, "*Hence, pampered minions, born of pride and folly,*" and ended, "*I scorn such soft-mouthed babblers.*" The third act (still unwritten) he assured her would be the most tremendous of the five.

His own observation, helped by hints from the neighbours, had taught him very soon that he was

living on charity, and a sense of gratitude to the Battles, no less than his own self-pride, filled him with a desperate ambition to be independent, and make a name. His father had been that sad anomaly, an accountant with a literary faculty; his mother was a poetess, who died in her effort to rhyme "love" with "drudgery." From both parents he inherited a desire for the vague, and a disgust for the tangible.

"Have you no pride?" he said to Jane one day, when she had seemed more amused than awed by his ambitious ideas.

"We must beware of pride," said Jane, who hoped she sounded humble.

"That is the right sort of pride—to feel that you come of honest people, and must bring no shame to them," said the boy, hotly. "I am not going to be the pauper of the family!"

"But you are a genius," said Jane. "How can you expect to be rich when you are a genius? I think you are very discontented."

De Boys sighed, but, remembering her good qualities as a fighter, pitied her weak sex and not her poor spirit.

Some months after the foregoing conversation, the curate of the parish, driven to his wits' end by the increasing wants of an increasing family, was inspired to offer young Mauden instruction in the Classics, in exchange for Miss Caroline's milk and butter. At first she had shrunk from this nefarious traffic in dairy produce and the Pagan authors, but no sooner had her common sense assured her that the plan was hugely to the lad's advantage, than she became as strongly convinced of its innocence as she had been of its

impiety. She soothed her father's unreasonable prejudices, which were not in disfavour of learning as learning, but of the time wasted in its acquisition. If, as she pointed out, De Boys worked at his books when the rest of the family were sleeping, and *if* the curate had no better equivalent than Latin and Greek to offer in exchange for food, and *if* he was too proud to accept it as a gift—— Her opening statement alone occupied forty-five minutes. Battle, who had set his face against De Boys "poking out his eyes wi' night work," and could find no words to express his mean opinion of the dead languages as weighed against fresh butter, relented at the first harrowing picture conjured up to his imagination, by Miss Caroline's ingenious hints of the curate's half-fed family. Her last mournful prophecy that the unhappy man's two girls would die of consumption before the year was out, and the baby have "rickets," was so soul-piercing, that the worthy farmer not only gave his consent to the bargain in debate, but even admitted, that the curate might not be a prophet in sheep's clothing of the type we are so expressly warned against in the Sermon on the Mount.

De Boys, whose burrs of knowledge picked up in the Town Library, and in the local "Academy for Young Gentlemen," had only served to tease alike his intellect and his spirit, saw a special Providence in the tutor, who was thus dropped, as it were, from heaven for his guidance. He hardly knew whither his thoughts and plans were leading him: the something ahead was so vague in outline, and so far away, that though he daily approached it nearer, it only seemed part of the general distance, the bit of high

mountain beyond many mountains, many roads and valleys. For the present he only knew he must work—work early and late, never despairing, yet never hoping too high—striving to do his best, but leaving it for others to say how good that best might be. Had he a talent, and was it the one he most coveted in the world?—Would he ever be a scholar? At last one day, between blushes and stammers, he asked his tutor whether—after thirty years or so of close application—he would know something. The Rev. Fitz Ormond O'Nelligan was one of those rare men, who, void of personal pretensions, are big with ambition for their friends. He slapped his pupil on the back with such force that had De Boys been a student of the weakling order, his earthly career would have ended on the spot.

"You will be the foinest Grecian in England," he said—"that is to say, if ye'll only be patient. At the Universitees now, the cry is all for mere lads, and a text which Bentlee would have approached with awe and riverince, and given the best years of his loife too, is now cobbled up by any schoolboy in six weeks or less. Avoid all such immoralitee. Fasten your oies on the gloreeous examples of the past, and if you are not noticed by this generation, there will be some roise up in the future, who will call your memoree blessed."

"What for?" said De Boys, who had fortunately mastered the art of grinning inside.

"For being the one scholar," said O'Nelligan, solemnly, "who had the humanitee to keep his wisdom out of print, and who did not regard the great masterpieces of antiquitee as so many door-

posts for every dog to defile. The simile is used by Erasmus."

This encouragement, delivered in O'Neilligan's most impressive manner (impossible to describe, and only to be imagined by those who may have encountered an Irishman with the blood of two kings, eighteen earls, and a Christian martyr in his veins), gave De Boys the self-confidence which he was too modest to assume on his own warrant. It must be owned, however, that his tutor's instruction was, though solid, excessively dull. The one consuming passion of O'Neilligan's life was grammar, and for his pupil's leisure moments he had invented a game on Comparative Syntax, which, in his judgment, transcended chess, and threw whist on its death-bed. Maunden felt, therefore, to his own dismay, a something not wholly unlike relief when, after three years of hard reading, the excellent man confessed that he had taught him what he could, and that the time was now come for him to show his mettle at the University. De Boys rushed home, and with characteristic impetuosity blurted out at the dinner-table that he was going to Oxford.

"What time do you start?" said the gentle Miss Caroline, who wondered whether his journey could have anything to do with the cow.

"To Oxford!" thundered his uncle. "To Oxford! This comes of listening to a curate's great swelling words of vanity. You know what the Apostle Paul saith, that those who *seemed* to be somewhat, in conference added nothing to him. Take heed by his experience. To Oxford! And what will you find there? The lust of the eye, the

pride of life, and the vain pursuit of vainer knowledge. The wise using their wisdom to confound the weak, working, not to the glory of God, but for the amazement of the sinner ; each man a law unto himself, and all in conflict with the powers that be. Let me hear no more blether about Oxford ! ”

Having finished his harangue, which he had delivered with such fluency that Miss Caroline suspected it had long been prepared for some such crisis, he left the room. De Boys, a little pale but not less determined in expression, went about his usual afternoon employment, which, since it had all to do with the farm, made it seem as though “Up-at-Battle’s” were, after all, the one reality in life, and his dream of a University career, a dream indeed, nay more, the very town of Oxford a figment of his imagination. At tea-time he did not feel hungry ; he walked instead to his favourite peak on the cliff, and sat there, gazing gloomily at the dancing sea. He was roused by a tap on his shoulder : he turned and saw Jane.

II.

WHICH CONTAINS SOME SERIOUS VANITY.

JANE had started from her home with her hair in a plait, but the wind, her quick walking, and her natural impatience of restraint, had shaken it free, and it now hung, neither curled nor crimped, yet far from straight, in one lively, glimmering mass below her waist. Her gown was of white cotton, and was so clean that it still smelt of the ironing-board, and so outgrown that it did not reach her ankles by an inch,—perhaps more. The ankles, however, were innocent, and did not fear the light of day. A wide-brimmed hat concealed the upper part of her face, and only left visible the tip of a lift-upward nose, a round chin and a finely-cut, but still childish mouth. Her cheeks and throat, though delicate in grain, were well browned, and while by no means rustic in mien, she looked what indeed she was—a daughter of the sun and rain. Jane was not beautiful; or rather, there was too much strangeness in her beauty, to make her seem so at first sight: reddish hair and a dusky face make an odd combination. There was an atmosphere of strength and sweetness about her which swept over the heart-sick De Boys like a mountain breeze; he drew a long breath, and wondered at the change in the weather.

“It is time to go home,” he said. She swallowed

her mortification : she had sought him in order to offer her sympathy.

"Why don't you go, then?" she said, as promptly.

He made several thrusts at the meek earth with his heavy walking-stick. "You know," he said, "your grandfather does not like you to be out late."

"I can fight my own battles," said Jane, tossing her head.

De Boys shrugged his shoulders, and tried to frown down his rising colour; he also turned on his heel and walked away.

"De Boys," she said, pursuing—"De Boys . . . I suppose you think I am a cat?"

"I hate cats," he said, evasively.

"Do you hate *me*?"

The pause which followed seemed borrowed from eternity. "I could hate you," he said; "but, as it happens, I do not."

"Do you think I am ugly? All the girls say I am a fright!" Her smile had a crook at each end: one signified amusement, the other contempt.

"I have never thought about your looks," said De Boys, with more honesty than discretion. "I suppose you are all right. But in any case I would never call you hideous!"

Jane had a longing to be thought pretty. Her ideal was the sweet portrait of a young lady (on porcelain) which hung in a photographer's window she knew of, and which represented a divine creature with blue eyes, pink cheeks, and blonde hair, waved and parted Madonna-wise. If she might only look like that! She had a fatal admiration for the conventional type angelic, being neither old enough nor

experienced enough to know, that holiness occasionally treads the human countenance on crow's feet.

"How do you like me best?" she said. "This way" (she showed her profile), "or *that* way?" (She looked him straight in the face.)

He gazed. "Are your eyes blue or brown?" he said: "in some lights they are brown, but that may be the effect of your lashes."

"I think," she said, "they are blue."

"They remind me of purple heather," said De Boys, with a certain dreaminess.

"Good gracious!" said Jane, blushing.

"And your mouth," he went on, warming to the subject, "is——"

"My mouth is a straight line," she said, sharply. "And now we must make haste!" She started ahead and began to hum. The first strains were a reminiscence of "Pleasant are Thy courts below," but, as the melody swelled, it found words which were De Boys's own, and which were these:—

“Love is a bubble,
Love is a trouble,
Love is a sigh,
And love is a grin.
Love is sweet honey,
Love is cold money,
Love is a lie,
And love is a sin.
Love is a jig—
So tread you a measure;
Love is a dirge—
So fill you with grief;
Love is bright wine—
To quicken your pleasure;
Love's the North Wind—
And Man the dead leaf.”

This effusion had been rejected by the editor of the *Brentmore, Haddington, and Melford Express* on the ground that it was "too reckless"; but Jane thought it extremely fine. Once, and only once in the course of her singing, she stole a glance at her companion.

De Boys was tall and straight, of careless but not awkward bearing. In countenance he looked like a cherub who had talked long hours with Puck—his expression was at once so subtle, so artless, and so discreet. A chuckle lurked in the deep recesses of his eye, but the imp rarely ventured to the surface. His nose had an eager and inquiring air, as though it were ever scenting for an undiscovered country; his beardless lips were pliant, and told his kind, pleasure-loving, and generous disposition.

He was the first to make a remark. "I have been thinking," he said, "what your mouth is like," he blushed—"it is like a kiss made incarnate."

"I hate kissing," said Jane, hurriedly. "I was not born under a kissing star. Kissing is silly."

"I fear it is," sighed De Boys.

"There is nothing to *fear*," said Jane. "But what does it mean, or what is the use of doing things which mean so little?"

"I think," said De Boys, trying to look unprejudiced, "kissing might mean a great deal if—the people cared for each other."

"Have you ever kissed any one and meant a great deal?" said Jane, with anxiety.

De Boys glanced up at the sky. "The clouds are brooding," he said. "I would not wonder if it rained. No, it is not my custom to kiss women. I hate it quite as much as you do."

She seemed sceptical. "Ah," she said, "but men are different."

"How do *you* know," he said, quickly.

"I cannot say *how* I know it," she answered, "because I must have known it ever since I was born."

"Let us talk of something else," said De Boys.

"You began this. Kisses and all such nonsense never come into my head. I—I always skip the love-making in novels." She uttered this astonishing falsehood with cloudless eyes.

"Oh!" said De Boys.

"Why do you say 'oh'?" I suppose you don't believe me. I do not care; if you wish to quarrel, quarrel. I will not say another word." She turned away her head, but De Boys heard the tears in her voice.

"Jane," he said, "I told you a lie just now. I once kissed Lizzie Cass, but it was very long ago."

"When?" said Jane.

"At the hay-making. She stood in my way, and, somehow—well, you know how these things happen!"

"No, I don't!" she said, with indignation.

"She isn't at all pretty; and it was only her ear! Your ears are like pink shells. But, unhappily, they never get in the way."

"I should hope not," said Jane; "I want no kisses spared from Lizzie Casses!"

"Then, if I had not——"

"But you have," she said, "and that ends it."

"It was months ago," murmured De Boys, "and I have changed since then. Life looks differently."

"After all," said Jane, "you were very honest to

own it. But as for Lizzie Cass, I always said she was a bold minx. She ought to be ashamed of herself!"

"Undoubtedly I was to blame. I ought not to have done it. I should have had more self-respect."

"Oh, well," said Jane, "it is a girl's part to behave herself. But whenever there is kissing, either at the hay-making or at any other time, I have noticed that it is always some girl who starts it."

"That," said De Boys, "may be true. But you are not like other girls."

"De Boys," she said, faintly; "please don't think I am better than I am. I deceived you just now; I did not mean——"

His face grew hard, his voice cold, his eye was dismayed. "Do you mean," he said, "that you have told me a lie? What was it about?"

"Oh, forgive me," she said, half crying; "I cannot think what made me say it. But it was not the truth—I do not always skip the love-making in novels."

He stalked on with darkened brows.

"You lied to me," he said; "it is the principle I am thinking of. I never thought you *could* lie—even for a good purpose."

"Jane put her lips together. "It was a little one," she murmured.

"Ah, but now I know you are at least capable of deceiving me, how can I ever trust you so absolutely again?" His voice had a mournful cadence.

"I don't know," she said; "but—*look* at me."

To look at her were fatal, and he knew it. He stared undaunted and with resolution right in front of him.

"Look at me!" she entreated.

"Why?"

"I want to see whether you are so angry as you sound."

"Angry is not the word," he said, "but grieved and disappointed. You were my Ideal."

She began to cry. "If you had told me I was your Ideal," she said, "I would have been more careful. It is so much easier to be ideal when you know that some one appreciates you."

Jane had not yet grasped the truth, that man is a spectacle for angels, and that he can carry his heroism, his noble sentiments, and his virtue into a wilderness, and still not feel that he is being heroic and sublime for nothing—a suspicion, however, which will assail him for more causes than he would care to count, if he look for mortal appraisal only. But love is two-headed egoism, and to Jane the Ideal meant De Boys's ideas.

She continued—"I do not want you to think me perfect; because I am not, and I could not be, even to please you. I am just like other girls."

"Well," said De Boys, at length, "perhaps I ought to be glad of anything that makes you more like me—that puts you nearer my level."

Jane looked troubled; she was beginning to realise, though dimly, the responsibilities of an Ideal.

"De Boys," she said, "did you ever think that I was better than yourself?"

"Better! It was not a question of comparison at all."

"And now," said Jane — "what do you think now?"

He hesitated. "And *now?*" she asked again. They had reached a gate which led into a kind of shrubbery. As she passed through her skirt caught on one of the spikes. He was awkward and slow at releasing her, and when they started to walk again, he lagged behind.

"Are you tired?" said Jane.

"No."

"Are you angry?"

"Yes."

"Very well; then we are not friends. But I would rather be so than have deceit between us. And you may as well know the worst of me at once. I am much plainer in the face than you think. Take a good look at me this way."

She pulled off her hat, tugged back her magnificent hair, and in her anxiety to appear at her worst, all but made a grimace. De Boys did not seem so repelled as she had expected.

"Take a good look," she repeated, faintly. "I shall never have the courage to do this again."

"I am angry," he said, looking, "because I hate myself and because you are still as far above me as——"

She advanced a step towards him. "I am not above you, De Boys," she said, "I am *here*."

He needed no second reminder, but with the agility of a practised lover, caught her in his arms and kissed her at random, and with an ardour which, though wholly beyond the measure of her own childish affection, filled her with nameless fear.

"There!" he said; "but don't ask me to look at you again. That's kissing."

Jane fixed her eyes on his with something like reproach. "I was happier before," she said; "much happier. I almost wish you had not."

"But I love you," said De Boys.

"Still," said Jane, "I wish you had not. I shall remember it."

"So shall I," said De Boys.

"But I only want to remember that I love you," said Jane; "and I want to remember it without distractions, and without kisses, which, after all, may only mean that I am standing in your way."

"Dearest!"

"Yet I am glad," she went on—"I am glad God made me a woman."

"Why?"

"That you might love me."

Once more a spell was in the air, but this time she had experience.

"Come," she said, quickly, "we shall be late, and the geese will want their supper."

Even thus does prose trample on the skirts of passion. They hurried on into the gathering twilight, on and on. At the hill they joined hands and ran, kicking, in imagination, the world (of their imagination), in front of them as they went.

III.

TOUCHING THE MASCULINE CONSCIENCE AND THE FEMININE REASON.

FARMER BATTLE, meanwhile, had retired to the solitude of his own chamber, to review a domestic situation, which, as Miss Caroline had rightly guessed, he had foreseen, and to some extent prepared for. It may be, however, that he had overlooked the serious difficulties of the case, in the seemly joy of composing a speech which would crush it; at all events, he saw plainly enough now, that the trouble, so far from being ended, had only begun. The outlook perplexed, worried, and distressed him more than his dignity was willing, but as his nerves soon forced him, to admit. His first act, therefore, on reaching his room was to pour out and swallow a large dose of a noxious preparation known as *Gump's Elixir*, and, as he was able to gulp this down with comparatively few qualms, it assured him, that his system could still endure the most extraordinary and violent shocks without surrender.

But though he could recall the physical man to duty, his mind remained in rebellion, and he sat down, with his body forward, his arms resting on his knees, and his hands clasped, the picture of doubt and embarrassment. He was a man of governed but primitive emotions, and knew nothing of the thousand-and-

one complications and combinations, which the cultured mind can make out of one rough passion chopped into polished fragments. His love was love, and his hate was hate, and his rage was rage: to excite either one was like pulling out the stop of an organ.

Like most proud men he was extremely sensitive, and he had been quick to notice his nephew's want of interest in farm matters and the comfortable home—the home which Battle himself had spent his days in making, and which was the crown of his earthly labours. The old man did not desire—nor indeed could he conceive—a greater happiness than to stand in his porch, and see the smoke rising from his tenants' chimney-pots, to gaze at the fine barn (once a miserable cowshed), at the dairy, and at the model hen-house built after his own design, with a patent door! Every twig and every stone on the estate had its value and association for him; every inch of the ground knew his tread; every corner, nook, and cranny stood for something in the sum of his experience. But De Boys could sit opposite the barn with his nose in a book; he accepted the dairy as a matter of course; he talked of crops and prize bullocks as though land which did *not* yield crops, and bullocks which did *not* win prizes were things unheard of; he ate his good fare and slept between linen sheets, not with gratitude, but as though he would have been very scurvily treated if he did not have such luxuries.

All this was a never-failing source of bitterness to the old man: what he gave he gave liberally; he only asked, when his gifts were accepted so freely, that he should be remembered with like readiness as

the giver. There was certainly nothing unreasonable in this desire; it was a very natural craving for some recognition of the toil and endeavour, the heart-aches and struggles which had gone to the making of his—as it must to every man's—success. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and if it is the weak and the slow who win, how is it done save by the most painful efforts, the sternest self-discipline, the most dogged courage, and the most touching patience? Battle, unable to analyze his feelings, was only conscious that he had fought a hard fight for sixty odd years, was still fighting, and not one member of his family showed, nor ever had shown, the smallest knowledge of it. The women he forgave, for two (his wife and his eldest daughter) were dead, one was a careful housekeeper, and the other, a slip of a girl, but De Boys—he could not forgive De Boys. That his experience was the common one of many husbands and fathers only aggravated the wound: he wished, in pardonable if foolish pride, to think that his family were altogether exceptional, patterns of goodness, sobriety, discretion and—quality so necessary to domestic comfort—obedience.

Much, no doubt, was to be said for the farmer, but De Boys was not without defence. He had appeared on the scene when things were prosperous, and he was still an untravelled youth of twenty; he was therefore quite unable to contrast the old farm with the new, or properly estimate a force of character which he could only know to be uncommon, by mixing with the world. In De Boys's green judgment all elderly relatives were severe, a shade despotic, and a little too religious; all women mended socks, made incomparable

pics, and scolded incessantly; all girls spent too much time *titivating*, were feeble in argument, yet pleasing enough in their way. These opinions he expressed with much confidence, and, boy-like, was so proud of his power of criticism, that he forgot he was directing it against the beings he loved best in the world. Boy-like, too, he was not only very shy of showing his affection, but he did not even know that he had it. Healthy-minded lads do not sit brooding over their instincts till they are hatched into Christian virtues and deadly sins: their conscience warns them which to follow and which to shun, but the why, the wherefore, and the psychological meaning of it all does not trouble them in the least. Thus, while De Boys would have defended his uncle with the last drop of blood in his body, he would not have been able to say just why. From this it will be seen, how far the farmer and the aspiring scholar were from a mutual understanding.

Battle's strongest impulse, after the scene at the dinner-table, was to order an immediate bonfire of all the Pagan authors in the house, and if it had been in his power to include the curate among them, it is not hard to guess how he would have dealt with that amiable gentleman. To think that De Boys should prefer the example of a weak-kneed parson (who could hardly keep his own body and soul together), before that of his lawful guardian, whose flourishing circumstances were the best possible proof of his fitness to advise! Yet De Boys was a clever lad, apt and well-spoken—if he liked books better than the fields, he had inherited the taste from his pitiable father. For a moment Battle wavered. If

he could call to mind one, even one, scholar who was able to show *gumption* at a crisis and keep a family in comfort, he would let the boy go his own gait. He was searching his experience for such a prodigy when a doubt assailed him: was not learning sinful? He consulted the third chapter of Genesis and read no further. Evidently, knowledge was not for man.

The farmer's relief was unbounded: he could not only make a virtue of his own ignorance, but stand opposed to his nephew on the vantage-ground of a great moral principle. He had a text—"*Ye shall not eat of it*"; he could not be held responsible for the hard sayings of Scripture, *his* only duty was to expound, and, when necessary, enforce them. His mind was fixed: he had settled the matter for ever—there should be no more weak relenting, no more teasing of conscience. He knelt down by his bed, and, thanking God for giving him light on the subject, was studiously careful not to ask Him for *more*: he even besought the Almighty to restrain his eyes from wandering to other texts, which might seem to contradict the sound doctrine of the one before him. He wound up by hinting, that if the Almighty saw fit to remove the Rev. Fitz Ormond O'Nelligan to another parish—or sphere—he (Samuel Battle) could only admire His divine wisdom and clemency. Strengthened and refreshed by this prayer, he rose from his knees, and, almost smiling, opened the door at which Miss Caroline had been softly tapping for some seconds.

"Well?" he said.

Miss Caroline studied his face with a half-fearful,

half-imploring expression. She had come to make intercession for young Mauden.

"I want to say something about the boy," she began. If the circumstances were ordinary, her heart, at all events, was heroic, and it is the heart which makes the situation.

"There is nothing to be said," said her father, sternly; "leave him to me. There has been enough of women's meddling as it is."

"I have a notion," she faltered.

"A notion! The whole house is swarming wi' notions. A man cannot sleep nor eat for them: they sour the milk and turn his bread to ashes; they confront him on his threshold and break in upon his converse with the Lord"—here he fixed his iron-grey eye on Miss Caroline—"they make his own flesh and blood a heaviness and his children's children as vipers!"

"The Lord forbid that a notion o' mine should work such mischief!" said Miss Caroline, drawing down her lip.

"I have no fault to find wi' you, Caroline," said Battle, in a milder tone, "but I do say that you ha' pampered that boy till he's fit for nought, but to sip tea wi' curates, and lose his liver seeking after lost Niobes!"

He had once overheard a brief conversation between O'Neilligan and Mauden, in the course of which they had referred to the lost Niobe of Æschylus. This mystery, Battle had no doubt, was a leathen god whom the world was all the richer for losng. "The difference," he went on, "so far as I can see between a man wi' notions and a man without 'em is this—the man without 'em pays the bill!"

"I see no harm in book-learning," said Miss Caroline, firmly; "we are told to add to faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and——"

Her father waved his hand. "Beware of twisting the Word of God," he said, hurriedly; "there's no telling what mischief may come of perking up on a false meaning. I don't hold wi' women quoting texts," he added, "and I doubt the wisdom of dragging Scripture in by the ears whether it will or no. Ten to one if it don't bite you for your pains!"

"Aye!" said Miss Caroline, "and for that reason ministers should have learning." She drew a long breath and flushed. "Why shouldn't De Boys be a minister?"

Battle plunged into thought. He never, in his own phrase, "fooled round the edge of an idea."

"A minister!" he said, at last. "What sort of a minister? If De Boys is the kind to be yanked about by deacons he hasn't much of the Battle stock in him!"

"There's room for all in the Church of England," said Miss Caroline. "A doctrine or two needn't stand in a man's way. What's doctrine? Why should De Boys call himself a Dissenter and spoil his chances, poor lad, when he might just as well be Broad and hold his own wi' the best? When folks begin to quarrel about doctrine they are really spearin' at politics. Any fool knows that!"

"I will think it over," said Battle; "but I could never see bone of my bone picked bare by deacons. Whenever I see a deacon I always think of the roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. Look at Hoadley

—a pleasant enough man till they made him senior deacon. There's very few men, Caroline, that can bear authority if they haven't been born with the shoulders for it. If you gave a man a nose who had never had one, he would be blowing it all day. If De Boys can see his way to do without deacons—well, I will think it over."

Miss Caroline went downstairs, scolded the dairy-maid on general grounds, called Jane to task for tearing her frock the Sunday before, hinted of dead parents turning in their grave, made a pudding with as little sugar as possible, and finally withdrew to her own room, where she indulged in a good cry. Heroism has a reaction.

Battle, however, had been so fascinated by the idea of De Boys entering the Church and "coming the Rectory" on his own account, that when his daughter had left him, he once more opened his Bible and found his thumb on the following sentence in Isaiah—"*Their strength is to sit still.*"

"The Lord's will be done," he murmured. "It is not for me to thwart the working of the Spirit. If the boy's call is to the ministry, he must obey it!"

It would be tedious to recapitulate the numerous consultations, plans, and hopes of which De Boys was the object, not only for days, but for weeks following. At first he had been tempted to quarrel with the profession so suddenly forced upon him: his religion, like the religion of the young, was an untried force, and, as his idea of God was somehow associated with his Uncle Battle, it was largely tempered with unutterable private opinions. But though he had often questioned

the infallible justice of the Almighty (with regard to fishing on Sundays and the like), his faith was so knit in his bones that it was more valuable as a ruling principle than any wider creed, based on the mere mental acceptance of doctrinal truths. The fear of God was before his eyes ; the prospect, therefore, of becoming His minister put no strain on his sincerity. If it failed to stir his enthusiasm it was because his easy-going nature hung aloof from the self-denial and hard work which, oddly enough, he conceived to be a clergyman's portion.

Where his books had formerly been ordered aside for the most trivial domestic duty, he was now frowned at if he ventured to look up from them ; if he showed the smallest disposition to levity, the farmer would remind him that it was time to put away childish things and reflect on the dignity of his calling : at his approach gossip was silenced, and Baptismal Regeneration, Predestination, and Justification by Faith became the lively topics of conversation ; if he betrayed even the mildest interest in "new trouserings," references would be made to Demas, who loved the things of this world, and to the young man who had great possessions. He began to see that a reputation for virtue and wisdom (however gratifying to one's vanity), brings with it pains and penalties so various, so exquisite, and so incessant, that Job himself would seem a false type of persecuted excellence, since he lived longer than his plagues. De Boys's patience, at no time of remarkable endurance, would not have lasted under the petty but fretting annoyances which now formed his daily lot, and which promised to grow in severity as he advanced in grace, if his determination

to go to Oxford had not been made with a firm resolve to suffer all things rather than fail to fulfil it. When the time came to leave home, he went with a sigh of relief so heartfelt, that Miss Caroline mistook it for a sob.

"The plum-cake is just inside the bag," she whispered, "but the currant wine is at the bottom of the box. I didn't put it on top because—as you are going to be a minister—it would not look well if the lid flew open!"

He heard no more, for the driver whipped up his horse, and, followed by tears, blessings, exhortations, and warnings, he rode off in the market cart towards fame and the railway station. He was so lost in fair dreams of the future that he did not notice Jane, who, by running across the fields and jumping a few ditches, had managed to reach a certain tree which commanded a fine view of the high-road. This she had climbed, and there she sat on a branch waiting for him to pass.

But while he did not see her for dreaming, he could not see him for tears. Thus her long run, and her jumps, and her climb were for nothing.

De Boys, however, had wished her farewell the night before, and he had felt the parting to the cost of his ability. He still felt it—dear, sweet little Je! (she was tall)—but now other matters were naturally foremost in his mind. Jane, woman-like, utterly unable to understand this, thought him very unlag, and decided to waste no more of her affection where it was not wanted. She was young—but seventeen in fact, impulsive, wilful, passionately fond of romances, but singularly practical in her criticism of life: sparing for her heroines as heroines, yet scorning them

not seldom as fools, admiring the heroes, yet finding much to be said for the villains, and displaying, for her age, sex, and inexperience, an unusual desire for strict—indeed rigorous—justice. Even now, smarting under De Boys's fancied indifference, she blamed her own poverty of attractions, not his callousness, which, since she promised—to the seeing eye—to be a beautiful woman, was as wrong-headed and feminine as it well could be.

As the days dragged on she realized how much De Boys had been to her, how much of her supposed independence had rested on his support, how much her courage had fed on his sympathy, how everything in her mind which gave her the smallest satisfaction was not her own at all, but borrowed from him. And now he was gone, it seemed as though the earth which she trampled on as a right, had suddenly slipped away, and left her without a footing, to sink, and sink, and sink, as one does in a nightmare. At first she saw a substitute for De Boys in a tow-headed youth who sang in the chapel choir, and she talked to him of the books she read, as she would to her lover, only to grow absent-minded, however, and wake to catch an unsympathetic and wondering eye: phrases, jokes, and little words full of meaning to herself and De Boys lost all their point when exchanged with her few friends in the village, and very soon she learnt the absolute dissimilarity in minds, and how very little except weakness one human being has in common with another.

Jane had always found such balm for all her small troubles in being understood by De Boys, which meant, no doubt, that he saw no fault in her, and

made a grace out of every shortcoming—that is to say, where her shortcomings affected others. He made nicer distinctions in her offences against himself. But in her dealings with the world at large he always proved her in the right, even when she knew herself in the wrong, and thus when she least agreed with him, he was most consoling. True, now he was absent, he wrote to her, but the letters were for family perusal, and even though "*Do not forget the guinea-pig,*" stood for "*My very dearest, how I long to see you,*" it was a flimsy substitute for a love-letter, her own, and bristling with "dearests" in plain English. Gradually restraint showed itself in her replies: the guinea-pig untimely died, De Boys adopted a more learned tone, Jane found him more difficult to answer, she doubted whether she loved him, and grew pale at the doubt; spent whole hours trying to prove that she was perfectly happy without him, and whole nights crying because she was not.

When she heard that he did not intend to return home till the end of his third term, she made no comment, but brought her lips so sharply together, that they lost their look of childish indecision for all time.

IV.

IN WHICH ONE LADY TRIES NATURE, WHILE TWO, DISCUSS HUMANITY.

ONE afternoon, in the following long vacation, a lady was gathering honeysuckle from a hedge in a field near St. Albans. She wore a pink cambric *confection*, artfully relieved with old Honiton : with one hand she held up her skirt and discovered a most elaborate silk petticoat ; on the ground by her side was a lace parasol and a pair of long kid gloves. A hat, garnished with velvet orchids and silk dandelions, shaded her face, and was tied under her chin with pale green ribbons ; her hair, which was black and very abundant, was loosely caught up by a silver comb. In figure she was tall and gracious, but one could have wished that her hips had more of a jut and her shoulders less an air of almost masculine resolution. She had too much distinction to be fashionable and too much style to be stylish : beyond any doubt she was a personage.

She had filled her basket with the flowers when her eyes fell on a fine spray just beyond her reach. The branch of a tree hung over the hedge, and, by supporting herself on this, she thought it might be possible to clutch at the prize. She was about to spring, when she was startled by the sight of a young man running towards her from the adjoining paddock.

Unobserved, he had been watching her for some indefinite space of time.

"Pardon me," he said, lifting his hat, "but I fear you do not see that the bough is broken."

"No," she said, with a baffling smile, "I only saw the honeysuckle!"

He looked at her, knit his brows, bit his lips, and then laughed. "So you only saw the honeysuckle," he said; "your point of view is magnificent!" He had not intended to speak so familiarly, but she reminded him so strangely, yet with so little reason, of a certain Jane Shannon he knew of, that he felt they were already well acquainted. The lady, however, unaware of her resemblance to Jane Shannon, gave him a severe look.

"I never thought I could meet any one," she said; "I did not know that there was any one in Whetstone to meet. Besides, this is not the high-road." There was a note of haughtiness in her tone, and her large black eyes wandered, apparently by chance, to a large notice which faced them both—"Trespassers will be Prosecuted."

"I am a stranger here," said the youth, flushing; "they told me at the station that I could get to The Cloisters by crossing these fields. I saw you were in danger, so I spoke."

He took off his hat and turned ever so slightly to go on. When a man is at most pains to conceal his admiration for a woman, he can be most sure that she appreciates his struggle to her finger-tips. The lady instinctively pushed back her hat, and gave him a longer, perhaps a kinder, glance; he remained.

She had a face of such spiritual liveliness that its

merely natural charms of feature and colouring, only seized on second thoughts. They were the thin veil over a sparkling radiance, which, whether it were due to virtue, or wit, or coquetry, was too dazzling for Speculation—aged twenty-one and a son of Adam.

"Did I understand you to say," she said, "that you were on your way to The Cloisters?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Then you must be De Boys Mauden." (He bowed.) "I am Sophia Jenyns."

"What!" he exclaimed, "the new Lady Macbeth?"

"The newest," she said, drily. "You must know," she continued, wondering at Mauden's extreme astonishment, yet pleased, for she could translate all things into flattery—"you must know that I came out to gather honeysuckle this afternoon, because I wanted to see whether I would be happier if I were more like the primitive woman. Every one is talking about nature, so I thought I would try it. I have been so bored: I longed to be at home reading Hardy, or St. Augustine, or Hegel, or *somebody*."

"Do you read Hegel?" he said.

"I read everything," she replied, "don't you?"

"No," he said, and looked gratefully at heaven.

This young lady who was so far from philosophy that she tried nature, and so far from nature that she longed for philosophy, chuckled and picked up her flower-basket.

"You Oxford men," she said, "are more proud of what you have *not* read than of what you *have* read. Come, we can walk to The Cloisters together. I hope you like Lady Hyde-Bassett as well as I do."

"I should like her better if I thought she had

a heart: no woman with a heart could have married Sir Benjamin."

"Did you know him?" said Sophia.

"No," said De Boys; "but every one says he was the most disagreeable man in the world; so forbidding and curt and unapproachable."

"I thought so once," said Sophia, "till one day, when I was a child, I heard him talking to Lady Hyde-Bassett. I suppose they thought I was too little to understand them. They were walking in the garden and he asked her whether she would rather be a pussy cat or a catty puss, and she pinched his arm, and said he was a good little thing, and it was a pity that some of the old fossils he knew could not hear him. And he said, very solemnly, 'God forbid!' and she kissed his hand and said he was an angel, but she wished he would buy a new hat, although he could only look lovely if he wore pyjamas and a billy-cock! And he said, 'For God's sake, don't talk so loud!' and she said, 'Let us both say Damn with all our might, and then I will be quiet.' And they said Damn, and she was quiet, and then they began to talk about Aristotle. That," she wound up, "is a real celebrity really At Home. So you see all scholars do not talk like Casaubon in 'Middlemarch'; they have their flippant moments, and get horribly tired of being great!"

No written account of Miss Sophia Jenyns's artless prattle could convey her melodious voice, grace of gesture, dramatic force, and facial expression. De Boys watched her, entranced; it was his first direct encounter with spontaneous genius. And then her fatal, too delicious resemblance to Jane! he could

adore her for that alone. She led the way and he followed: a Will o' the Wisp would have been a safer guide.

Lady Hyde-Bassett was an American by birth, and had received her education in France. After much travelling and many flirtations she had married, at the age of two-and-twenty, the distinguished invalid and philologist, Sir Benjamin Bassett.

The *Hyde* was an inspiration attached to a small property which he had inherited towards the close of his last illness. The marriage had been eminently happy, but before the Society of Antiquaries had ceased to wonder at the devotion of so young and modish a woman to the apparently grim, the certainly middle-aged, and, by inference, dull hieroglyphic, he died. His widow's grief was of the desperate order, but, possessing ample means, she was able to wreak it by building a marble tomb over his bones, and founding a Hyde-Bassett Scholarship for Greek Verse. To perpetuate the deceased gentleman's tolerant and unprejudiced temper she also endowed, with equal generosity, a Roman Catholic School, a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, and a Mission for the Suppression of Secret Societies. When pressed to give her reason for subscribing to the latter, she said that Sir Benjamin, to his sorrow, had belonged to one. "But," she added, "the rest is silence." With accomplishments which only wanted an occasion to reorganize Europe—or destroy it—she preferred to live in retirement and make matches, comparable only to Diocletian, who found (if we may believe him) greater happiness in planting cabbages than in ruling the Empire of Rome.

Her country house, known as "The Cloisters, near St. Albans," was, as it were, a home of rest for the most eminent in science, politics, art, and literature of her day, for, from her intimate knowledge of one genius, she never committed the error of making them seem common, by entertaining more than one—of his particular sphere—at a time. The distinguished person, therefore, who accepted her hospitality, never laboured under the unspeakable apprehension of encountering either his nearest match, or worse, his horrid better.

Now while Miss Sophia Jenyns, of the *Parnassus*, was gathering honeysuckle, her ladyship was reading "The Logic of Hegel." The room in which she sat was large, and breathed a sweet odour of peace and good housewifery. Its furniture, hangings, and decoration, though rich, were of a modest and even severe character, forasmuch as the cushions, coverings, footstools, screens, lamp-shades, photographs, and gew-gaws appurtenant to a modern boudoir were comfortable and pleasing by their absence.

"*Man is evil by nature,*" she read, "*and it is an error to imagine that he could ever be otherwise. To such extent as man is and acts like a creature of nature to that extent his whole position and behaviour is wrong. Nature is for man only the starting-point which he must transform to something better. The theological doctrine of Original Sin is a profound truth.*"

She sighed, and looked up from her book to gaze into a small silver-framed mirror which stood on the table by her side. Her complexion was pale, her eyes brown, and her hair prematurely grey. Some of her lady friends said they *believed* she thought she looked like Marie Antoinette. Her years were thirty-five,

but a life of assiduous self-discipline and self-culture (glorified selfishness, in fact) had given her the calmness and dignity associated with the idea—if not the reality—of old age. A woman so finished in manner, dress, and bearing could only be called artificial in comparison with the ordinary type, in the sense that one might so describe a sonnet as differing from a folk-song.

Meanwhile, the leaves of Hegel were fluttering. Margaret, with a sigh, wrenched her eyes from the mirror and fastened them once more on "Original Sin." But again she read no further, for a lady entered the room.

Miss Bellarmine was not a maiden lady of that pathetic type who pour out tea and who have once loved. She was tall and of commanding appearance: her figure was considered purely Greek. (Perhaps this was because she had the good taste to drape it with Parisian millinery of modern date.) She had really beautiful features if one examined them separately, but as a whole they appeared out of drawing, as though they had been picked off various antique divinities, and stuck on her face at random. Thus, her nose began too soon, and her mouth ended too late; whilst her eyes, charming in colour and shape, were so placed that they offered one a constant temptation to shift them either higher or lower. Her expression was neutral, for her character, like that of many Englishwomen, slumbered behind her countenance like a dog in its kennel, to come out growling or amiable as circumstances might demand. She was highly accomplished, and spoke five languages with one well-bred accent. Theology was her recreation, but Villon the serious study of her life. Her notes on this poet promised

to be the most exhaustive possible, and "Bellarmine on Villon," it was said, would be read like Coke on Lyttleton, as much for the commentary as the text.

"I am so glad to find you alone," she said. "Sophia Jenyns has gone out for what she calls a prowl, and Wrath is playing Bach in the music-room. What a gifted man! What *is* the relationship between them, dear? I have heard every impossible explanation."

Eliza Bellarmine was a discreet, cold-blooded person who could meet Nature face to face without blushing, and wink at the frailties of Culture. Lady Hyde-Bassett, on the other hand, would only see evil where she wished to see it: when she met unpleasant truths she rode off on what she called her instincts, and they carried her like Barbary mares. She did not reply to her friend's question immediately.

"There is no truth in the story," she said, at last.

"I have heard," said Miss Bellarmine, "that there is more than truth—there are diamonds!"

"I thought, Eliza, you were above such littlenesses. Sophia Jenyns is the most pure-minded woman I know. She is not like other geniuses—she is different."

"They are all different—with a sameness. I have known thirty, and they were all pure-minded, and had, at least, three husbands and an episode!"

"We must not judge them," murmured her ladyship; "they are so fascinating, and their husbands are always so brutal."

"The artistic temperament," said Miss Bellarmine, in measured tones—"the artistic temperament is only faithful for the purposes of local colour—to *experience* fidelity, in fact. Then the next step is to gain some

insight into infidelity. Unless a genius is extremely religious she is foredoomed to impropriety ! ”

“ Eliza,” said Lady Hyde-Bassett, “ you have neither humour nor imagination.”

“ None,” said that lady, with conscious pride.

“ And yet you are editing a poet ! ”

The commentator smiled, which the poet, could he have been present, would not have done.

“ But,” said Miss Bellarmine, who never left a subject unsifted, “ you have not explained the relationship.”

“ Wrath adopted Sophia when she was only four days old: her father committed suicide, and her mother died when she was born. I blush for human nature when I hear a man so maligned for a kind action. He must have been very poor at the time, for he had only just sold his ‘ Antigone.’ ”

“ I know all that,” said Eliza; “ and it was very noble on his part, and all the rest of it. But Sophia is no longer four days old ! ”

“ If they cared for each other, is there any earthly reason why they should not marry ? ”

“ Certainly. He may have a lunatic wife locked away somewhere, or, in his extreme youth, he may have married some low person who is too respectable to divorce: nothing is more likely. I am very sorry for Sophia Jenyns, and more sorry for him; but I think they should either be frank, or separate. If they think they are wrong, they should bid each other good-bye, but if they feel they are right, they should have the courage of their opinion. I could respect them then, although I might disagree with their conscience. As it is—well, they evidently know they are

doing wrong, since they dare not be candid. And they must be wretched ! He is far too honest a man not to be miserable in a false position."

"I have listened, dear," said Lady Hyde-Bassett, "because your sentiments are so excellent. But—first swear you will never tell !"

"I cannot give my word blindly."

"Then I will not tell you."

"Have I ever betrayed your confidence ?"

"Never," said her ladyship ; "but—this is a most profound secret."

"In that case perhaps you ought not to repeat it."

"You are so aggravating, Eliza ! Shall I tell you ?"

"That is a matter for your own judgment."

"Never breathe it to a soul ! Wrath and Sophia have been married for two years."

"You astonish me," said Eliza, at last, but without moving a muscle—"you astonish me greatly. . . . But I am inexpressibly relieved to hear it. . . . Any children ?"

"No," said Lady Hyde-Bassett ; "so it could not have been on that account. . . . But now," she went on, "we must talk of something else : it would be very awkward if either of them came suddenly in. Have I told you about De Boys Mauden ? He has just won my scholarship : a most brilliant young fellow ; they say he will be another Porson. But he has been overworking, and the doctor has insisted on his taking a rest. So I have made him come here. I sent the brougham for him, but he told Biffin he preferred to walk. He cannot know the way, and,

manlike, would probably rather perish than ask any one to direct him !”

“I shall be most interested to make his acquaintance—most interested. I know his name quite well.” She did not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of principle a commentator and an occasional contributor to the learned reviews, could not be ignorant of the existence of a future Porson.

“He is very handsome,” said her ladyship ; adding, after a pause, “when he has got his degree I shall let him revise and augment all Benjamin’s unpublished manuscripts. I began them myself, but my Greek is too Homeric !”

“Mr. Mauden,” announced the footman.

V.

IN WHICH A LADY HAS A TANTRUM, AND A GENTLEMAN PLAYS A FUGUE.

SOPHIA JENYNS had parted company with De Boys in the hall, and was now hurrying towards the music-room, where Wrath was playing a fugue in masterly style. But Sophia was in no mood for harmony. She burst open the door, flounced in, and put her arms round her husband's neck.

"Tom," she said, "I have been reconsidering what you said this morning about making our marriage public. I know myself so well that I am sure I could never love you again if you did. There is not a correct bone in my body: it would kill me to be called Mrs. Wrath—simply kill me. I adore you and worship you and idolise you, although you are my husband. That I cannot help; but to let other people know it—oh, intolerable! I will *not* be a British matron. I will *not* be called virtuous. It is no one's business whether I am married or not—a lot of fussy, prying, evil-minded old women—let them talk! I think of them when I say, '*I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry*'—no wonder I make the whole house creep! Buh! And, Tom—you fascinating, lovely, wonderful creature, I have just been flirting with all my might, and by to-morrow I shall be madly in love! Compared with you he is a

monster, but in your absence he does very well. He is already quoting Spenser, and his voice is agreeable. Tell me you worship me, and I will tell you the rest!"

"Why don't you flirt with me, dearest, and leave these young fellows to their work?"

"My soul," said his wife, "my heart of hearts, you are the dullest person to flirt with I ever met: I never flirted with you in my life: I half-tried it once by pretending to love you. But I found it too easy to pretend—hence our hideous, inartistic marriage certificate! Never refer to it if you have any regard for my self-respect."

"Sophia, seriously——"

"I will not be glared at, nor frowned at! How handsome you are! If you were not my husband I would elope with you to-morrow. What a mercy I met you before I saw any one else. If I had met you too late—oh, if I had met you too late——" She paused. "I am afraid I would not have called it too late!"

"This is all very pretty," said Wrath, "and you are, no doubt, very adorable. But you must behave yourself; other people do not understand you as I do."

He was about eight-and-forty, and looked older. His features, though fine, were irregular; his poetic brow, his large and eminently practical nose, the unrest in his dark eyes, and the stillness about his mouth betokened him the possessor of an unusually complex disposition. He was an extremely handsome man, yet such was his simplicity, that not all his wife's flatteries could convince him that he was other than plain. The

absence of personal vanity in an eminently self-conscious age, when every hero sings his own epic, had the curious effect of making many people accept him at his own estimate: they argued, from their own experience, that a person who was not his own greatest admirer could not possess admirable characteristics.

"But seriously," he said, secretly enjoying his wife's brilliant, ever-varying countenance—from the artistic point of view she was a constant joy—"quite seriously. You must be guided by my knowledge of the world. I must announce the marriage, and so put an end to this revolting gossip!"

"Revolting gossip does not matter: only facts are fatal—simply disastrous. Do not expose me to the humiliation of being publicly branded as an honest woman!"

His mouth twitched: there was always too much sadness in Sophia's jesting to make it downright laughable.

"While people can talk about us," she went on, "we give them an opportunity to show their charitable view of human nature, and so they encourage us; but if they once knew the truth, no one would care to see me act, and your pictures would be called dull, I know!"

"Where," he said, "do you learn this cynicism? It afflicts me beyond words: it is utterly false, utterly corrupt, utterly disgusting. You certainly do not hear it from Lady Hyde-Bassett."

She glanced at him swiftly, and as swiftly glanced away. He had coloured a little—no doubt from annoyance.

"Lady Hyde-Bassett has not lived my life," she

said, catching her breath; "she was not a born pauper! Her father was not starved out of his wits, and her mother did not dance herself to death for a pound a week."

"Sophia!"

"Oh, I know you have always been very kind to me. I am not ungrateful."

"Do you talk of gratitude—to *me*?"

"I will talk of anything I like to anybody! . . . Have you asked Margaret to sit for the Madonna?"

"I have asked her to give me a sitting or two—yes. But it is merely for the shape of her face: it would not be a portrait. Pray be careful how you refer to the matter, because I was studiously careful to explain that I could not paint the Madonna from any woman in the world. It merely struck me that Marg—— that Lady Hyde-Bassett's face was peculiarly——"

"Fiddlesticks!"

"If you are going to be peevish, I think we had better not talk."

"You are very unkind to me. And I have a frightful headache: I can hardly see. I am sure this place is unhealthy. . . . I was only thinking, why trouble Margaret to sit, if you are *not* going to make the picture like her? What would be her object in sitting?—she might as well be a lay-figure at once. I am afraid she will feel insulted."

"She seemed to perfectly realize what I meant, and was very amiable about it."

"Naturally! She could hardly let you see that she was annoyed—in her own house, and when you are a guest! . . . Why can't I sit for you?"

"Your type, you know, dearest, is—is not conventionally religious. You are most beautiful, but——"

"I would do very well, I suppose, for the Woman taken in Adultery!"

"I have never seen you like this before."

"Perhaps not. Thank God, I don't sit with my mouth screwed in one perpetual simper, looking religious, and wondering whether my new gowns will fit! I want you to understand that I have got a soul! and a mind! and individuality!"

He sighed and returned to his playing; but there was no spirit in his performance.

"You are not to tell Margaret of our marriage," said Sophia, suddenly; "when I get ready, I will tell her myself."

He flushed again, and this time more decidedly. Unfortunately, he had informed her ladyship of his happy condition that very afternoon—in a burst of friendly confidence—after she had promised to sit for the Madonna. Could the circumstances be more awkward?

"Do you think she suspects?" said Sophia. But women have a fatal genius for answering their own questions. Before her husband could reply she went on, "I do not see how she can; I have always been very careful."

"Sophia," he began, intending to make a clean breast of the matter, "the fact is——"

She stamped her foot—a beautiful foot, too, another artistic joy. "I *loathe* facts; I will have my own way about it. You promised me that I could keep it a secret as long as I wished."

"I know that," he replied, "but you said this morning——"

"I am always being told what I said this morning! Never mind what I said six hours ago: it is the afternoon now. I suppose I may change my mind."

"But," he said, "I am heartily sick of all this absurd mystery. I—I am rather proud. I cannot explain it, but it affects your honour. These reports you find so amusing are gross insults. I was mad to make such a fool's promise."

"No," said Sophia, "you were not mad, you were in love with me, that's all. You have promised anything!" It was most indiscreet to remind him of this mournful truth. Wrath received it with sublime (if highly coloured) indignation.

"I was never *in love* with you," he replied, angrily. "I detest the phrase. Wife to me is a sacred name. . . . But few women understand a man's best feelings, and least of all on the subject of love. They do not realize that even the vilest of us would *rather* think that the woman he loves is a bit of divinity. . . . But it is very seldom that she will let him think so—very seldom. . . . Are we quarrelling?" he said, abruptly; "once I thought we could never quarrel. This is terrible!"

"This," she said, "is marriage!"

"You speak as though you regretted——"

"You recognize regret as though you were long acquainted with it!" A woman always handles sarcasm with the point towards her own breast. Sophia turned pale at her own words.

"You *do* regret," she said.

"I regret anything that makes you unhappy."

"This is equivocation: you never did speak out and you never will. A man so guarded in his words must have very treacherous thoughts. Why do you look at me like that?" she said, passionately. "I repeat, you are very difficult to understand. I have been with you ever since I was born, and I have always done all the talking!" He did not attempt to deny this, but still kept his eyes on her with the patient, touching, and wistful expression of the collie dog in "The Shepherd's Chief Mourner."

"One has to take you on trust or not at all," continued his wife; "the most exasperating man God ever made! It is a most unfortunate thing that we ever met: you are naturally secretive, and I am naturally suspicious. Why did you not let them take me to the workhouse? And why did you make love to me? You know you did: I cannot remember one single word you ever said, but you have got an artful way of implying everything under the sun without uttering a syllable! You never even asked me to marry you: all I know is, that I am married and I wish I wasn't." And she wept. Sophia never exhausted herself by restraining her emotions; tears now sprang to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks so softly and sweetly, that to see her one would have thought that weeping were as easy as breathing. It was a pretty study in highly cultivated sorrow.

"My dearest," said Wrath, "you are not well. But this is all my fault: I have been a beast. How can you like such a great, clumsy, ill-natured brute? It is a very flimsy excuse, but I think I worked too long this morning. Margaret was reading aloud and I did not like to——"

"What was she reading?" said Sophia.

"Some new novel: I forget the title, but," he added, "the cover was green!"

"What was it about?"

He grabbed at the opportunity to amuse her, and detailed the plot with elaborate care—drawing however rather from his imagination than his memory. The result was an adaptation of "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," "Wilhelm Meister," and "Gil Blas." He might have made some fame as a novelist.

When he had finished, Sophia coughed. "How well you remember it," she said; "you must have listened very attentively!"

Then, remarking that she felt better, she left him. He heard her singing "I know that my Redeemer liveth" as she went up the stairs, and rejoiced that he had cured her headache, and could resume his fugue.

So little do men know their wives.

VI.

IN WHICH A LADY LOOKS GRATEFUL.

WRATH had been playing in ineffable contentment for some thirty minutes, when the door was opened softly and Lady Hyde-Bassett walked in. Her gait was peculiar—not goddess-like, defiant, and untrammelled in the manner of Sophia, but agreeably suggestive of moneyed leisure, a certain feminine timidity, and clinging draperies. She was already dressed for dinner, and was looking her best in violet silk and amethysts. Here it may be a fitting opportunity to mention that she was ever attired in beautiful garments: “How can I make myself a fright,” she told Eliza Bellarmine, “when I know that my dearest is watching me from heaven? It would make him so unhappy to see me growing dowdy!” Which, Eliza thought, would have been impious had it not been American.

Margaret and Wrath had known each other for many years. She had often given him motherly advice in his attempt to bring up Sophia (who was her junior by some ten birthdays), and their friendship, which had been somewhat solemn during Sir Benjamin’s lifetime, was now stepping the enchanting measures of an intellectual jig. It may be that if Lady Hyde-Bassett had not vowed perpetual widowhood, and if Miss Jenyns had not suddenly grown

from a tiresome schoolgirl into a maddening but all-compelling woman—— but why dwell on might-have-beens? Wrath, however, had very nearly loved her once, and as he was not a man who cast his affection on what was unlovely, where he bestowed it, there it remained. He was quite conscious that he had a kind regard for Margaret, but the difference between that kind regard and his overmastering, limitless devotion to his wife was so immeasurable that it never even occurred to him to compare them. One woman occupied his life, and the other an occasional thought, and even that thought would be, as it were, a ripple on a whole ocean of Sophia.

"It is wicked to interrupt you," said her ladyship, as she entered, "but I must steal a moment just to tell you about my new genius—young Mauden."

"A new genius?" he said, lifting his eyebrows.

"I am not overrating him, I assure you. *Once* you had more confidence in my judgment!"

"Naturally," said Wrath. "That was when *I* was your new genius."

"Ah, why refer to my past follies?" said Margaret, which was certainly an adroit way of suggesting them. She was a coquette before she was a widow.

"I own," he said, "it is not pleasant to be reminded of one's mistakes."

"I never mistook *you*," she murmured: "I was only mistaken in myself."

"I can remember," he began—"I can remember——"

"Do not remind me," said Margaret. She was wondering how she could ever have allowed herself to even vaguely contemplate the impossible possibility

of marrying again. It was her only consolation to think, that for at least six months after Sir Benjamin's death she had not been in her perfect mind : chaos was come and the reign of irresponsibility. "It wanted a Shakespeare," she thought, "to make the Lady Ann accept Richard III. over her husband's coffin : it must have been then or never !"

"Do not remind me," she said again.

"Is it only men who should have the burden of remembering ?" said Wrath, surprised at his unusual power of repartee, and deciding that it was inspired by the twilight.

"I remember too well too many errors," she sighed.

"Ah !" said he, "women only confess the sins they have left *undone* !"

"It was a man who prayed for a talent of forgetting !"

"He prayed in vain," said Wrath, now thoroughly exhausted and wishing to Goodness that Sophia would come in and "do the talking." Half-unconsciously he turned an ivory button in the wall, and lo ! the room was illuminated by the discerning beams of the electric light.

"What a useful invention !" he exclaimed.

"Most useful !" said her ladyship, no less heartily.

"By the bye," he said, "Sophia has retracted her promise that I might announce our marriage. She is sublime ! As she is suffering from neuralgia," he went on, "I did not tell her——"

"I will be as silent as the grave," said Margaret, divining his whole difficulty at a guess.

He could only gaze his gratitude, admiration, and

wonder. "I never tease her when she is studying a new part," he explained; "she is much too sensitive to be able to do good work under the stress of annoyance. And to a woman of her nervous temperament a small fret is more distressing than a serious calamity: her patience is too mighty for trivialities. Paper boats cannot sail in the north wind!" He smiled, and was evidently fully alive to what the world called the *cussedness* of the divine Sophia: only he did not call it cussedness; it was to him the last magnificent touch to her colossal spirit.

"But when *do* you try her patience?" said Lady Hyde-Bassett. "If every woman of genius had such a husband! I do not wonder that she worships the ground you walk on: that is a secret which she cannot keep. Oh, when a man is unselfish, no woman—not even the best—can compare with him. Splendid! splendid! I have only known one man like you, and that was Sir Benjamin." The sudden remembrance of her own desolation was so afflicting that her eyes filled with tears.

"Do not mention us in the same breath," said Wrath; "you know what I think about him."

It had been his appreciation for Sir Benjamin which had assailed her heart so perilously in what we call the If period. "It is such a comfort to me," she said, "to know that at least one of my husband's friends had some conception of the man apart from his attainments. I must have loved him, if he had only been a sausage-seller!"

It was, no doubt, very touching, and perhaps an occasion when her ladyship could throw an affectionate glance at her guest with perfect propriety.

But Sophia, who happened to come into the room at that moment, and who had not heard the preceding remark, did not understand it.

"Oh," she said, lightly, "I am looking for young Mauden. Such an intelligent boy! I promised to show him the conservatory."

Without looking at Wrath—or at least, without appearing to look, for we may be quite sure that she had nicely observed every line of his countenance—she wheeled round and went out.

"How lovely she looks in that yellow *crêpe*!" said Margaret, not enviously, yet with a sigh. "It is nice to be young!"

Wrath felt that it would ill become him to be unreservedly enthusiastic on the subject, seeing his close relation to the lady. But he walked to the door and watched the incomparable creature sail down the corridor.

As he went upstairs to dress for dinner, he wondered what he had done to deserve the love of such a woman, and, lest any cynical reader should assume that so excellent and kind-hearted a man was thanking Heaven for a blessing which he did not possess, let us hasten to add that Sophia was no less often astonished, on her part, that she was blessed with such a husband. For, to do her justice, she knew his strength and her own weakness: if he indulged her beyond reason, the fact was due to his magnanimity and not her superior will. He might have crushed her but did not. Hence, his charm.

But on that particular afternoon Sophia's heart was usurped by feeling very unlike gratitude: vague anger, clear discontent, and motherless desperation—the three

witches of a woman's soul—were doing their best to work mischief. To be suspicious of Margaret was unfriendly ; to distrust Wrath was something not very far removed from base—so kind a husband, so devoted a lover, so upright a man—yet she could not forego the luxury of a grievance. Besides, in spite of all argument, common sense, and justice, she really was jealous.

Why should her husband paint Margaret Hyde-Bassett as the Madonna, and why should Margaret Hyde-Bassett roll her eyes at Wrath ?

VII.

SHOWING HOW SOME VERY NECESSARY INFORMATION MAY SEEM LIKE A DIGRESSION.

It is an obvious truism that love in all human relations is, in the very nature of things, selfish; those who love unselfishly only do so by living in a state of constant warfare with their meaner instincts. The natural desire is to absorb every thought and moment of the loved being; to begrudge every interest, and dislike all things and anything which would seem to distract the You from incessant dependence on the Me. This is the undisciplined, raw desire: many conquer it—Wrath, for instance; more, like Sophia, do not.

Yet she was not an exacting woman—the self-repression was by no means all on his side: she suffered her husband's interest in his pictures with silent heroism; she oftened remained away from his studio lest she should interrupt his work; she concealed many of her professional worries for fear of causing him needless anxiety—for a creature so wayward and naturally heedless of others, her thoughtfulness where he was concerned was even pathetic. But it is only one more paradox from that nest of paradoxes—the human heart—that only love is strong enough to subdue love, and affection had worked its great miracle in Sophia's wilful nature. When Wrath was

in question she was capable of any sacrifice, could have made herself as though she were not, would have renounced all things and followed him gladly—did he wish it—into obscurity and the suburbs. It was because she honestly believed that his social position would suffer if their marriage were made known, that she pretended to hold such eccentric and unfeminine views on the subject of a fair name. How the poor creature winced and ached under the looks and whisperings she daily noted and overheard, it would be impossible to say. A woman who is really living an immoral life always feels, like a condemned criminal, that the verdict is, if hard to bear, certainly just. But to Sophia, conscious of her innocence and only too proud to be the wife of the man she loved and honoured above all others, the mud pellets aimed at her reputation, stuck like knives in her heart. That she was suffering for an absurd reason has nothing to do with it: death in grotesque circumstances is none the less death, and the martyr to a fool's cause is still a martyr. As we have said before, it is the heart that makes the occasion.

It had transpired, after Wrath was elected a Royal Academician, that his family was most distinguished: his uncle the Cabinet Minister, his cousins the Wrath-Havilands of Wrath, his mother's aunt, the Marchioness of Welby, and his connections, the Granville-Coxes of Somerset, to say nothing of his step-brother, General Gorm-Gorm, and his step-sister-in-law, Lady Gertrude Gorm-Gorm, &c., &c. To Wrath himself the whole thing was too ludicrous to be contemptible, but Sophia—poor Sophia—was undeniably impressed. The early teaching of a

And here let us judge kindly of Sophia ; she had been much spoiled, she was young, beautiful, and had great talents. For even less cause many poor mortals have been led into vainglory, and have suffered much vexation of spirit. She had not yet that great gift of self-knowledge which, though a painful blessing, is still our greatest and the one to be prayed for beyond all others ; for the man who knows himself in all his great imperfections and small virtues, suffers more under praise than he ever could under censure—which, at worst, can only remind him of what his too-willing conscience has forgotten. }

We have said that when Sophia left the music-room she was, in spite of all reason and duty, jealous ; it followed therefore that her vanity was all the more sensitive. The long glance of reverential but intense admiration which fell from the fine eyes of Mr. De Boys Mauden, when she met him in the conservatory, warmed her chilled soul. She smiled divinely, blushed celestially, and murmured, for no earthly reason, "I am late !"

De Boys, reconsidering the meeting afterwards, wondered how he found strength to resist the impulse to cry out "Jane !" and kiss her. Her likeness to Jane—Jane, whom he passionately worshipped, and whom, in all devotion, he hoped to make his adoring wife—was too bewildering.

It is just possible that Odysseus would have gone to greater lengths than the faithful Penelope, on the reasonable argument of a strong resemblance.

VIII.

SHOWING HOW TRAGEDY IS NOT ALWAYS IN FIVE ACTS.

MISS ELIZA BELLARMINE, all this time, was sitting in front of the looking-glass in her bedroom, wondering whether her eyes showed the effects of weeping. She wept so seldom that when she did, her face for some time afterwards would be irresistibly suggestive of the beach after a storm.

"It is hard," she said, staring at herself, "that one woman should have so much, and another, nothing. Who could blame Wrath?"

From which the intelligent reader will at once gather, that the learned and austere Miss Bellarmine had bestowed her heart on one who had never sought it: on one who she had just learnt was the husband—and the devoted husband—of another woman. So strange is the feminine mind, that while she had quailed under the gossip which associated Wrath and Sophia in a more than charitable alliance, her position did not seem quite desperate. He would arise one day, assert his higher self, and cast about him for chaste society, coupled with moderate charms. But now—O heavy fate!—this could not be: he had married the daughter of Heth.

Eliza had not the temperament of those who consume with idleness and call it hopeless passion;

her love was wholesome and honest, and worked for good, not evil. She was only too well aware that she had no smallest claim on Wrath's consideration : he had given her no encouragement—indeed, it would have been hard to find a man who had less of the drawing-room gallant in his manner with any woman. So marked was his deficiency in the elegant art of disrespectful attentions that many fashionable ladies declared they could not endure the rude monster, and were he not supposed to be wonderfully clever (although *they* could see nothing in his pictures), they would never even notice the wretch. Eliza, therefore, like many of us in unhappy circumstances, had only her own foolishness to blame, and that she knew this was not the least bitter of her several pangs. But already she had put Wrath out of her heart for all time.

“Never, never, never, never !”

This was her solemn incantation, and lo ! even as she spoke the only romance of her dull life shivered, sobbed, and vanished. She could have cut off her hand with the same unhesitating precision had it seemed necessary. But such triumphs, whether over the will or the body, are not cheaply won : decisive moments are not realized by time, and what is done in sixty ticks of the clock the soul must remember or regret for eternity.

Eliza, having mastered a great situation in her life, was only conscious that she felt much older and very tired. She bathed her eyes, ordered herself some tea, and sat down to read Arckenholz on Christina of Sweden—four portentous volumes which she had chosen from Sir Benjamin's library as light, yet

useful reading. And although it might have been more dramatic if she had indulged instead on a long soliloquy on the hollowness of life, the injustice of God, and so on, there are those who might think it was more heroic to blow her despised nose and study a tedious historian.

Half an hour later when Eliza entered the drawing-room she discovered Wrath and Lady Hyde-Bassett playing chess, and Sophia (who hated games of every description), engaged in a most animated conversation with De Boys Mauden. No one seemed to notice her entrance except Margaret, who gave her a swift smile and indicated with her eyes a new book on the side-table, as much as to say, "That will interest *you* more than either of these men." Eliza sighed, but drifted towards the volume. Literature was still her friend.

"How I should like to paint her as St. Martha," said Wrath, in a low voice, to Lady Hyde-Bassett; "she has just that expression of kind, yet terrible energy St. Martha must have had!"

"How a love affair would improve her!" said Margaret; "every woman should have at least one love affair."

"But she is a nice creature," said Wrath. "I am very fond of her. She is a good but inaccessible angel."

"I am going to marry her to Claverhouse Digges," said her ladyship, confidently, "I shall arrange it all next autumn!"

Artistic chess is a game beyond the petty restrictions of science.

IX.

WHICH INTRODUCES A DOWAGER AND A PEER.

THE Dowager Countess of Warbeck awoke one morning at eight o'clock and discovered that she could not fall asleep again. She rang for her maid, complained that she had passed an extremely bad night (for she usually slept till nine), and arose from her bed.

"Will your ladyship have breakfast earlier than usual?" said the maid.

"No," said her ladyship, who did not feel hungry; "but tell Dawson to sound the gong for prayers at half-past eight." She therefore put her bad night to excellent account by reading her assembled household three lessons instead of one. Would that all good Christians killed their time with so much profit—to others!

When the domestics had solemnly filed out of the big dining-room, the Dowager turned to her grandson—the one prop of her declining years—with an air of almost tragic appeal.

"I suppose," she said, "I must go to Brentmore and see this Battle—or Cattle—person?"

"It would look more friendly, if you did," said her grandson, "but I have no wish to urge anything of the kind upon you, if you feel unequal to it."

"I never allow myself to feel unequal to a duty, Warbeck. But the position is heart-breaking."

The position which her ladyship found so distressing was briefly this : she had been the second wife of the 14th Earl, by whom she had one son, the father of the present Warbeck. The late Earl, however, had had four other sons by his previous marriage, the youngest of whom (Edmund), he had disowned for marrying a yeoman's daughter. Not to detain the reader with tedious particulars it will be sufficient to say that Destiny had played many sad and unlooked-for tricks with the three elder sons and their children, and now, with the not uncommon irony of human affairs, Jane Shannon, the daughter of the cast-off Edmund, was heiress to the great estate. The Dowager's grandson had the peerage, but the cream of the property—the famous "Drawne acres" of that Anne whom we mentioned in the first chapter—had fallen to Jane. No wonder the Countess could not sleep for bitterness of spirit, and no wonder Warbeck was leaving England that very morning for the Continent.

"After all these *thousands* of years, to see a Warbeck reduced to poverty!" groaned the Dowager—"I repeat, *poverty*! Heversham Place is the sort of residence for a superior cottage hospital, and Graylands is only fit to let to some American, or to a Colonial. *You* cannot possibly live there. No Earl of Warbeck has had his foot inside it since 1550. Drawne estates, indeed! Who would have heard of them if Anne Drawne had not married a Shannon? Who fought for them, bled for them, died for them? No Drawnes, but the Earls of Warbeck. And now this Cattle person is to have them all—and Grosvenor Square, too!" This was her magnificent manner of referring

to the town mansion, as though only one house in London could justly claim that address. "Grosvenor Square, too," she repeated; "and you with no roof over your head. *Fifteen thousand a year?* What is that? *Far more than you need?* It is not a question of *need*, it is a question of what you *require*—what is decent. And as for calling this Cattle person, Lady Jane——" Words failed her.

Her grandson smiled patiently; he knew this harangue by heart. But he never permitted himself—even in solitude—to fall below the Stoic ideal. He wore a hair-shirt under his fine linen, and took his rule of life from Sir Thomas More, but, unlike that saint, he suffered religious doubts. It was said that if he had written something touching against Christianity, or something pretty about Moll Flanders, he would have been a Superior Person. But Superior Persons do not wear hair-shirts. There are good men who yet bear on their countenance the scars of many battles lost and won; their knowledge of good is ever shadowed by their knowledge of evil; they are all things to all men that they may by all means save some. But Warbeck was not of these. Sir Launcelot may have died an holy man, but Sir Galahad lived holily also. It was the latter knight who had most fired the young peer's imagination. His was no self-conscious virtue, however; at times he even affected airs of worldly cynicism which reminded his grandmother of the Miltonic Archangel who tried to explain heavenly mysteries in earthly language—and blushed red in the attempt. He was, too, a powerful fellow—not weakling, who made a virtue of debility, but a man. "What a fish for the Church!" said a bishop, who had his eye upon him.

Warbeck had all that longing of a strong nature to help some one—to feel that he was of some use in the world ; and he would have undergone any suffering or hardship if he had once persuaded himself that his pain would promote another's peace. But to suffer to no purpose ; to study for hours with no other desire than the accumulation of barren knowledge ; to pour weak advice into unwilling ears ; to offer dumb praise to a deaf God ; to spend his time, as a witty philosopher has said, milking a he-goat into a sieve—these were things he could not do. He knew that he was considered promising by those friends whose judgment he could not choose but value, and his University career had more than fulfilled their expectations. Yet the self-distrust was there—a haunting thought lest, in the end, he would not only disappoint those who were dear to him on earth, but that possible God who had a way of asserting His authority in the form of a still, small conscience. Youth is naturally impatient, and is not content to remain blind for even three days like St. Paul, nor can young enthusiasm believe readily that those also serve who only stand and wait. The impulse is to rush into the fray, to kill or be killed, but both or either without loss of time or hindrance. Vanity, too, and ambition, no less than a zeal of serving the Almighty and humanity, may have something to do with the fierceness of this desire, so easy is it to flatter the soul that the glorification of self is all to the glory of God. These and similar thoughts, while they restrained Warbeck from any active participation in public affairs, were silently working for good, strengthening his judgment, and giving him some insight into his own heart and human perplexi-

ties. He would know his work in due season; but the time was not yet come. Already he had heard the whispers of a calling, though the voice was dim and far off, not yet to be perfectly known. So he tried to be patient.

When the Countess of Warbeck's carriage drove up to "Up-at-Battle's" that same afternoon, (Brentmore is about three hours' railway journey from London), Miss Caroline was what she called *turning out* the sitting-room. Both she and her niece had dusters pinned round their heads, and wore big aprons. Although the preceding night had brought a lawyer's letter telling Jane of her extraordinary change of fortune, she had not realized its full meaning—nor, indeed, had Miss Caroline. They were both simple-minded beings, and had been brought up to think that their daily tasks must be performed, even though the heavens were falling. It was the *day* for the parlour, and though Jane had inherited all England, the room had to be swept and garnished by some one, and as Jane was on the spot, she was, of course, the some one to do it.

Jane opened the door herself, and found the footman standing—almost gingerly, as though he were treading on very doubtful substance—on the front step.

"Is Miss Battle at home?" said he, saying Battle with difficulty, for his tongue did not take kindly to trashy syllables. (The Dowager had made up her mind that she would first ask to see the aunt, and thus avoid the unspeakable Lady Jane Shannon. "Fiddle-de-dee on courtesy!" she had told her grandson.)

The footman assisted his aged mistress out of the carriage with respectful sympathy.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing——?" began Lady Warbeck, feeling for the first time in her life, and very much against her will, that it is not the apron which makes the servant.

"I am Jane," said the girl; "will you come into the kitchen, for the sitting-room is full of dust?"

The Countess, in spite of her eccentricities, was a well-bred woman—one who had travelled much, observed much, and read much. She was, too, so absolutely sure of her own excellent social position that she suffered none of those fears so common to mushroom nobility, lest she might not be taken for the exalted being she was. She could, if necessary, adapt herself to any scene or any society; she did not look less a countess because she sat in a kitchen. Good breeding does not require a background. She always held, however, that nervousness in her august presence showed very proper feeling, so she looked at Jane very hard for seeming so unembarrassed. Jane met her look modestly, and with the respect which instinct taught her was due to one who was so many years her senior, but with no more fear than if her great relative had been—as her ladyship wrote to Warbeck—"a tabby cat on a wall."

Miss Caroline appeared from the scullery, where she had been washing her hands, and greeted her visitor with much old-fashioned grace, but, it must be owned, little style. That is to say, she neither tittered nor stared, nor assumed an unnatural voice, but spoke and acted exactly as she always did when there was no one in sight and hearing save Battle and Jane.

"I suppose," said Lady Warbeck, when she had learnt that they were both quite well and did not find the weather trying—"I suppose you are making your preparations to come up to town. But Grosvenor Square is a little sombre just at present."

"It must be dreadful," said Jane, with much sympathy, "so soon after a death."

"Shocking!" said her ladyship—"Shocking! It has been a matter of national regret; the Queen sent me three telegrams."

Their thoughts were disjointed and confused; these three wondering women—one young, two simple, and one neither young nor simple—had all kind hearts, although education, experience, and rank had set very different seals on each.

Miss Caroline looked at the Countess, and saw more than an elderly lady in a bonnet and mantle.

"Poor thing!" she said, and her honest eyes filled with tears.

Lady Warbeck did not know how to explain that by no possible effort of her imagination could she think of herself as a Thing. So she pretended not to hear.

"I cannot yet trust myself to speak of these painful events," she went on. "I hope I am resigned. 'Man that is born of woman——' It is not for us to question the inscrutable decrees of Providence." Then she turned to Jane. "It would give me much pleasure if you would spend a week or so with me, and I think, in the peculiar circumstances, it would be the most proper course to pursue."

"I think so too," said Miss Caroline. "I have been worrying ever since last night—when we heard

—because I knew no one who could really advise her and tell her just what to do. Girls are so thoughtless.”

“So much depends on one’s bringing-up,” murmured her ladyship. “I daresay you are looking forward with immense delight to your future life, and your first season, and your new frocks, and so on !” (The Dowager was most serious when she seemed flippant.)

Jane had all a girl’s love for beautiful clothes, and already she had certainly dreamt of a heavenly gown, soft-hued, with *straight* back seams and a train. She had also designed a black silk dolman for her Aunt Caroline. She therefore blushed a little at Lady Warbeck’s question, and owned that she had thought of ordering a new dress.

“Can you return with me to-morrow ?” said Lady Warbeck, venturing a smile ; “there are a great many tiresome legal matters to go through, but our man of business—he will be yours as well now,” she added, with a sigh—the sigh was absolutely necessary—“is most considerate. Everything, no doubt, will adjust itself in the most satisfactory manner.”

As a matter of fact, she began to see possibilities as many and great and tall as the Anakims. Warbeck, happily, was still unmarried. . . . She had decided that Jane only needed to have her hair done properly, and to be generally overhauled by a good maid. For the rest, she was even pleasing ; she was uncommon, and uncommon girls were in demand ; that was why those Americans married so well.

“You must keep your delightful country ideas,” she said, pleasantly, remembering Lord Warbeck’s love of the unaffected. “I hope London will not make you cynical. Men hate cynical girls.”

"Why should London change her?" said Miss Caroline, wondering whether "cynical" was a new epidemic: something of an asthmatic nature.

"Well, I hardly know how to explain," said the Countess. "It is one of those things one takes for granted."

Miss Caroline looked anxiously at Jane. Everything in the nature of change alarmed her.

"Do you think," she said, at last, "that London will be good for Jane?"

"London is very healthy," said Lady Warbeck. "My doctor tells me that even the fogs are wholesome—if your lungs can stand them."

"It is not the fogs I fear," said Miss Caroline, "it's the folk."

"The folk?" said Lady Warbeck, "the *folk*? I understand. I know very little about them. They keep in the East End. Once or twice my dear stepson lent them Grosvenor Square for a meeting. But we were all out of town at the time."

"Aunt Caroline calls everybody, folk," explained Jane, colouring in her effort not to laugh.

"Really?" said the Countess. "Of course there is no such thing as *everybody*—that is a newspaper vulgarism. One is either a somebody or a nobody—irrespective of rank or profession. The next best thing to a somebody, is a nobody in a good set!"

She smiled as she spoke, for there were few pleasures she enjoyed so much as expounding the truths that be—as she understood them. Had she been born in a humbler sphere she would, no doubt, have been the principal of a ladies' college. Women who possess what Mr. Joe Gargery called a "master mind," like

to manage men, but they like to manage other women still better: it is a greater triumph from an artistic point of view. Lady Warbeck promised herself unalloyed joy in directing the unsophisticated being Heaven had dropped in her way.

She had to endure several pangs, however, as she drove to the hotel, (where she was spending the night), for she could not persuade herself that because Jane was unassuming she was necessarily meek. And meekness in a *protégé* is an essential, if one is to be a patroness with any degree of comfort or satisfaction. The Dowager was by nature a kind woman. If she was approached with what she considered proper respect, she was often found even heroic. She would put herself out to do amiable things: she arranged meetings between people who wanted or were wanted to make each other's acquaintance; she found berths for younger sons; she assisted mothers with their daughters; she begged unscrupulously from the rich; she pushed young talent (she encouraged all the arts); she recommended governesses, and dressmakers, and orphan homes, and hospitals, and hotels, and deserving cases—indeed, to sum up her virtues in a sentence, she never missed an opportunity of doing something to her credit. And now she had taken a fancy to Jane—which was the highest possible credit to both of them. For her ladyship had good taste and was not easily satisfied.

"The child is neither good form nor bad," she wrote to Warbeck. "She is no form at all, and would be called *original*. (I do not mean that she swears like Lady Buntynge.) She is very innocent, and has, I assume, *no* accomplishments. But really,

dear, I cannot help thinking *that* is an advantage. Nowadays *every* one wants to perform and *no* one will listen, and a nice quiet girl who can *merely* appreciate would be much sought after. She must take up some *serious* interest, and I shall advise *Greek*—it is better than philanthropy, because it does not let one in for *bazaars*. I shall also urge the engagement of a governess-companion—that sweet, lady-like person whom the dear Baroness was telling me of would be *just* the creature. In appearance your cousin (for she *is* your cousin, after all) is most pleasing, her features and bearing reminded me in the most *painful* manner of your grandfather.” (*The deceased peer in question had been distinguished for his moral rather than his physical charms. His wife, however, may have discerned him spiritually.*) “Imagine my boundless relief to be so agreeably disappointed. She is *much* handsomer than Tunborough’s *scraggy* Lady Marian. By the bye, I hear that Lady Marian’s photographs are for *sale* in all the shop-windows, and that they sell better than those of that *Granada* person, who has such fine legs and *jumps*. Lady Dundry, Marian’s godmother, is so upset about it that she has *turned Roman Catholic*. Poor dear!” (*Lady Warbeck divided the human race into dears, poor dears, and persons.*) “I will write more fully in a day or two, but remember that I am getting old and cannot be with you much longer.

“Your affectionate grandmother,
“A. WARBECK.”

“That little hint about my age,” she thought, “will bring him home at the end of the month.”

And she slept more soundly that night than she had for many weeks.

Jane, on the morrow, when she found herself actually seated in the train and gliding out of the little station at Brentmore, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry. She had not shed tears over her parting with her grandfather and Aunt Caroline, for she was coming back to see them again so shortly, and they had both seemed in such good spirits at her wonderful fortune. (Fortunately, Jane was not hard to deceive, for neither old Battle nor his daughter were adepts at concealing their emotions.) But now she felt lonely; the Countess had warned her that she always slept when she was travelling, and never attempted to talk, so Jane stared out of the window, and found her only comfort in thinking that now she was rich she could send De Boys anonymous bank-notes and so enjoy the rare distinction of helping a genius. For she no longer thought of him as her lover: a very dear friend, that was all, a sort of relation, almost a brother—but more interesting. If he ever married and had children she would be their godmother and *try* to like his wife. She might also build him a church, and in the meantime she would do all she could for poor Mr. O'Nelligan, the curate, who had been his tutor.

When she thought of herself she was at once both eager and fearful to learn what the Future would be: as if there is not always still another Future—when one Future has become a Past—to fear and yet rush into! Her personal experience of the world was slight to the point of nothingness, but from a long course of incessant and unsystematic reading she had gathered

such a variety of (more or less uncertain) knowledge, from metaphysic to the Greek drama, that she was, as she told her aunt, prepared for anything. In imagination, she had walked in courts and market-places, in ancestral halls and suburban villas; poets, scholars, and wits were her constant companions, not to mention kings and archbishops; for one accustomed to such company, the Dowager Countess of Warbeck, and even a row of flunkies, had no terror. When she saw the big drawing-rooms at Queen's Gate (the Dowager's town residence) she thought that the kitchen at Up-at-Battle's was more cheerful. Even the piano, which had ebony legs and was elegantly draped in an Indian shawl, seemed to cry out for a sympathetic touch. Jane in her grey alpaca felt very sorry for it. Lady Warbeck had been fully prepared to see her trip over the rugs, slide off the brocaded chairs, and dazzled by the unaccustomed splendour of her surroundings. It was disappointing in some respects that she did not, yet, on the whole, satisfactory.

"To-morrow," said her ladyship, "I suppose you would like to see Grosvenor Square?"

"Any day you think best, grandmamma!" said Jane.

The Dowager had told her that she preferred this mode of address. But, as her maid told the housekeeper, "Her lad'ship was not born yesterday—*she* knew what *she* was about, bless you!"

"Trust her," said the housekeeper, "she's got the brains of the whole fam'ly; she'll marry Lady Jane to his lordship—mark my words!"

Thus profanely do hirelings discern the hidden motives of the mighty.

X.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY AND OTHER UNCERTAINTIES.

GIVEN two young people, idleness, and a week, and the sum total is Folly ; add the artistic temperament and a pretty gift for philosophic discussion, and you get Sympathy ; multiply by a sound knowledge of the Classic amorists, and the result is Romance.

De Boys had been at The Cloisters one week when he received tidings of Jane's altered position. He felt at once that whatever hopes he had formed with regard to their marriage, would now be idle, nay, more—presumptuous. Such instant surrender, it may be, showed modesty and good taste, but for a lover he was, perhaps, resigned too soon. Resignation is an heroic virtue, but it best displays its spirit after a sharp tussle with despair. In this instance, however, it seemed as though the two giants had merely yawned at each other. Mauden had not the smallest doubt of his great love for Jane, notwithstanding he wrote so seldom and a cold tone had crept into her replies—all that sort of thing could be put right in a single interview, when the time came for a serious understanding,—or, at least, it might have been put right, if she had not inherited this beastly money—and the beastlier title. He had already made up his mind not to enter

the Church, and had his eyes fixed on a professorial chair. Professor Mauden and Lady Jane Mauden did not, in his opinion, sound well. By a confusion of ideas, too, Jane Shannon seemed the shadow and Sophia Jenyns the reality, and while he composed his pretty speeches to Jane, he rehearsed them (with appropriate expression) to Sophia. It must be remembered, he was quite unaware that the actress was Wrath's wife.

Wrath had begun his Madonna, and when he was not painting, he would sit in rapturous thought. The Madonna, too, not to speak irreverently, had Margaret's nose—and Sophia's nose had a far finer shape than Lady Hyde-Bassett's. Sophia shed bitter tears over the agonizing pettiness of the whole trouble; but, in the first place, she was feeling ill, and secondly, as she told herself, straws show which way the wind blows. That her husband made his picture like Margaret, against his will—indeed, unconsciously—was a significant and appalling fact: his very St. Joseph had a look of her. Yet Wrath fondly imagined that his work was purely ideal, flatly opposed to realism, all composed from the unearthly material of his religious instinct. These reflections and a constant headache were as frank in their villainy as the stage-direction—"Enter, attendant, with two murderers." No creatures for compromise, these!

Sophia was strolling in the garden with De Boys one afternoon, and found herself thinking that love was a mistake—it made one too unhappy; friendship, on the other hand, was soothing and agreeable.

"Social conventions," De Boys was saying, "are the greatest nuisance. I would banish them with a

fiery sword. There were none such in the Garden of Eden ! ”

“ Ah, but in the Garden of Eden there was only one woman ! ” sighed Sophia.

“ Why,” he said, in an injured voice, “ do you always pretend to be so cynical ? I do not see why we cannot go back to—the sort of existence—I mean the idyllic and perfect state of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Merely viewed as a philosophical experiment it might at least be attempted. If it proved successful, it would encourage others——”

“ But if it failed——” said Sophia.

He cleared his throat. “ You must let me translate for you some tremendous passages from the ‘ Phædrus,’ ” he replied. “ Plato deals with the whole question as only a poet can—for he was a poet. And I think you will say with me that it is a poet’s subject ; its philosophy is not of this world, but is, as it were, a figure of the True, and musical, as is Apollo’s lute. I cannot agree with Browning when he speaks of—

“ ‘ The heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the world to lose itself in the sky.’ ”

Why give so much consolation to those who have failed to realize their ideals—who have merely aspired, and utter no word of praise to those who have actually attained to Higher Things ? All the teaching of the present day seems to assume that no man or woman ever yet accomplished a purpose, or thoroughly believed in anything or anybody ! ” It is so delightful to be young, and long-winded, and able to believe, at

least, in oneself! "A hero, nowadays," he went on, "need not fight: he has only to say he would like to fight if he could!"

"You have so much moral courage," said Sophia, "and I have none!"

"If I may say so, I think you are the most courageous woman I have ever met. You have not only the power to Will—but to Do."

"I fear you are mistaken. I have too much Do and too little Will—if you understand me."

"A little impulsive, perhaps."

"I can only resist one impulse by yielding to another," said Sophia. "I know my own character too well. I need a restraining force."

De Boys drew himself up, and would have made a fine allegorical study for any of the heroic virtues.

"You," he said, "may need a restraining force in the same way that a highly poetical imagination requires discipline: noble desires and fine thoughts must not be wasted on that 'chartered libertine,' the air." The breeze stirred a maddening curl which fluttered on the nape of Sophia's neck, and the young man sighed. So far, air had the advantage of philosophy.

"A woman like you," he said, "so extraordinarily gifted—I speak quite impersonally—might do so much by refusing to accept the low standard of existing morality. We want some beautiful and witty saint: what Wrath might call 'a saint in drawing.' It is such a cruel wrong to give people the idea that only sinners are amusing or good-looking. There is sublime beauty, no doubt, in the mere expression of a pure-minded being: but when a fine spirit is set in

fair material, and she can flavour her chaste conversation with Attic salt, her influence must undoubtedly cover a larger field than if she looked dowdy and talked banalities. And, I take it, a woman who did not accept life in its vanity, would find no possible pleasure in the adornment of her own person: she would simply regard it as a duty which she owed to society—one which, I think, would come under the head of honouring the king!

Sophia felt her enthusiasm rising towards sainthood: De Boys had a perfectly charming view of moral obligations.

"You think," she quavered, "it is a duty to try—and look—decent!" Two hours and a half spent over her toilette that morning needed some slight justification.

De Boys's eyes wandered over her face and figure.

"Unquestionably," he said, with what resembled, but was not, calmness; "unquestionably, a duty."

"How," said Sophia, "should one begin if one wished to rebel against existing low standards of morality?"

"By the silent but convincing force of example," he replied—"by your actions."

"What kind of actions?" she asked. "You know—I have—" she blushed—"a soup kitchen."

Delicious simpleton! and with it all, a genius!

"Soup kitchens," he said gravely, "are excellent; but, morally speaking, they do not convey anything but soup."

Their eyes met, and the result was a duet in laughter.

"You shall not make fun of me," she said at last.

"Make fun of you! As if I could make fun of you!"

"I often laugh at myself," she said. "I am always ridiculous; even when I am unhappy I am perfectly absurd. All my tragedy is in my acting; my real life is a burlesque."

"But when are you unhappy?" he said, in a voice of unfeigned concern, and with a fierce glance at the imaginary offender. "When are you unhappy?"

"Often," said Sophia; "in fact, always. I am so tired of being treated like a buffoon! Even Wrath himself—even Wrath, my first and dearest friend——" she paused.

"Of course," said De Boys, swallowing envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness at one gulp, "he must be your dearest friend."

"All my life," she faltered—"all my life—my friend; but even he tells me that I act well only because I must. And is not that in itself sufficient to prove that he regards me as an irresponsible being—a marionette with a faculty of speech? I know my words are often very silly, but my thoughts are terribly serious. Oh, if he knew how serious!"

De Boys himself was surprised at her change of manner—although it had never occurred to him that she was absolutely flippant. He had explained away her whimsicalities and nonsense as the vagaries of genius. What would have looked like affectation in a woman of commonplace attainments, seemed, at least, pardonable in one who had so many atoning qualities; she was not, however, attractive because of her foolishness, but in spite of it. Young and inexperienced as Maude was, he felt all this no less

than the middle-aged Wrath, who had loved Sophia too long, and loved her too deeply, not to love also with wisdom. The difference between these two men—the one who loved her and the one who thought he loved her—was shown in the fact that, while Wrath helped her, as delicately as he could, to overcome her faults, Mauden encouraged them. Yet such is the contrariety between effects and intentions, that neither Wrath nor Mauden, nor, be it said, any human creature, could give Sophia the one thing needful—peace of heart. She chafed alike under praise or blame: no one understood her, no one knew what she really meant or really wanted; even her nearest, best, and dearest misconstrued her ten times a day.

“If he only knew,” she repeated, “how serious I am!”

“You must remember,” said Mauden, “there are a great many years between you; Wrath probably regards you still as a small child. It was and is exactly the same in my own home: my uncle—the kindest and most generous man in the world—never can understand that my days for leading-strings are past.”

Sophia caught her breath: De Boys had plucked up the very root of the matter. She was no companion for Wrath: he thought her too young—perhaps she wearied him, just as children occasionally tire even the fondest of their relatives. It was only natural that he should find Margaret Hyde-Bassett’s society so pleasant: they were nearer in years, they had both lost their sensitiveness to mere impressions, and were now rather re-colouring their old experiences than gaining fresh ones.

"I never thought of that before," she said, "but now you speak of it, I see the reasonableness of the idea. It explains everything."

"But," said De Boys, "we are both young: we can never seem children to each other. We both know that we are responsible beings, that we are masters of our fate: that we are under the law of liberty."

"Masters of our fate," repeated Sophia; "do you believe that?"

"How can I disbelieve it," he said, "when I live and have the evidence of each day to convince me."

Sophia turned her face towards him. "Tell me," she said, "what I must do. I am tired of thinking. The world seems so unreal sometimes, and words and people and things lose all meaning. But I could be obedient, I could do what I was told, and I think—I could be happy that way. I want to escape from my own commands: I—I am too merciless a tyrant."

"Sophia!" said Mauden. He had never called her Sophia before: it was a great step for him, but she was too preoccupied to notice it. "Sophia," he said, again, "can we not both be obedient to our best instincts? can we not follow them—together?"

"What are they?" said Sophia; "and can we trust them?"

Before he could reply, the sound of Wrath's deep, rare laughter came through the windows which opened on the lawn. Was it thus that Madonnas were painted?

"Finish," said Sophia, turning pale—"finish what you were going to say—when he laughed."

"I think I could write it better," said De Boys.

"Do you, too, write?" she said. "A—a friend of mine had—a friend who never told her anything, but he wrote beautiful letters—oh, such letters! and then he would walk up and down the room while she read them." Her head drooped and her voice trembled; these reminiscences were heart-breaking. "But," she said, looking up, "you are not at all like the man who did that: you are quite—quite different. I should have thought *you* could have spoken out."

"I can," cried De Boys, on his mettle—"I can! I will, now that you have told me—I may."

"Of course you *may*," said Sophia, "because my knowledge of you assures me that you will not say anything—silly. I mean something which ought not to be said—or written."

1957-2
"Friendship," said De Boys—"perfect friendship casteth out fear. Between friends there ought to be no dread of giving offence."

"N—no!" said Sophia; "but at the same time we must not think that our friends are the only people we can treat rudely, and with unkindness."

"Unkindness!" said De Boys. "How can you so misunderstand me!"

"I was not thinking of you," she said. "At that moment I had other friends in my mind—women friends."

This was only a half-truth, and it flashed across her mind that it was not easy to be saintly even in the course of a most innocent conversation: one could lie in all circumstances and for the most trivial reason—indeed, for no reason in the world.

"The ideal union," began De Boys—"the union we have already discussed——"

"The Before-the-Fall ideal," she said, quickly. "I know."

"Why could not we—would you be willing—I should say—would you mind very much—being called my wife?"

"My dear De Boys!" she murmured, with maternal pity and affection—"My dear De Boys"—and she looked at him, smiling helplessly—"My dear De Boys!"

Anything more chilling to lover-like aspirations is not to be imagined. Long years afterwards the echo of that motherly "My dear De Boys!" could bring an east wind on the warmest day.

"It is my turn," he said, hotly, "to be treated like a buffoon when I am serious!"

"Don't say that," said Sophia; "but—but the idea startled me!"

"Is that all?" he said, eagerly; "because, in that case, you might become accustomed to it."

"First," she murmured, at last, "let us clearly understand what the idea is."

"We should remain, just as we are—friends," said the young man, "only truer friends than the world understands by the term; but, as a concession to propriety, we would go through the ceremony of marriage. It—it is rather difficult to explain in detail: the ideal never does lend itself to definition!"

"There would be no love-making—nothing silly," said Sophia, "nothing commonplace, and ridiculous, and domestic!"

"Certainly not."

"Then," said the lady, "suppose we tried it for a little before we actually bound ourselves by any religious and legal form?"

He saw immediately the countless advantages of this suggestion, and, as they unrolled themselves he grew pale at the *disadvantages* of his first plan. It is the memory of peril and not peril itself which is so appalling. De Boys looked back at the last ten minutes as he might have glanced at a thunderbolt which had missed him by an inch.

"We must, of course, do nothing rash," he said, "because rashness would mar the harmony of the action. To do things decently and in order is the very rhythm of existence."

"I will think it well over," said Sophia, "and let you know my decision on Monday; but until then do not refer again to the subject. If we talk, it must be as though this conversation had never taken place."

"But on Monday," said De Boys, "I must leave."

"Then," said Sophia, calmly, "I will tell you in good time, so that you may make the necessary preparations—whether I have decided to accompany you."

"But," he stammered, "might not that look odd? Your guardian——"

"I am not Wrath's ward," she said; "I am my own mistress. Leave everything to me."

A long silence followed: they sauntered, one of them quite blindly, towards the house.

"I fancy," he said, "I heard the dressing-gong."

Sophia thought, that although he was a better conversationalist than Wrath he did not wear so well: two hours seemed to exhaust the fund of his ideas.

Now Wrath could maintain an interesting silence
from year's end to year's end.

“Oh ! the difference of man and man !”

Gentler ladies than Goneril have had occasion to
utter the same lamentation.

XI.

IN WHICH ANOTHER YOUNG GENTLEMAN DEFINES DUTY.

THE Dowager Countess of Warbeck found Jane more interesting each day; she was so quiet in manner, so sweet-tempered, so thoughtful, so sensible—in fact, the Dowager's letters to her dear friends the Marchioness of Dayme and the Lady Dundry, were always overweight during that period. Her notes to her grandson, however, were brief, telling much of her own ill-health and very little of Jane. The Countess never made the fatal mistake of supposing that the rest of mankind were fools, and she alone had wisdom; she gave every creature credit for a certain amount of perception and a great deal of cunning. For this reason her machinations usually proved successful. She was extremely careful not to drop a word which might excite Warbeck's suspicion of her darling scheme; she even wrote him a glowing account of a new *débutante* who, she declared, had exactly the kind of beauty he admired. Her heart swelled with a diplomatist's pride when she received a telegram from the young peer announcing his sudden return to England. "Let him once see Jane," she thought, "and the rest is inevitable."

In the meantime, his portrait (painted by Wrath,

the Academician) was placed in a better light, and Jane was occasionally reminded that although the work in question was an excellent likeness, it did not do the original full justice. "No artist," said the Dowager, "could ever catch his smile!"

"He is certainly very handsome," said Jane. "Grandfather's nephew," she added, after a little pause, "is also handsome. The one, you know, who is so clever and who is now at Oxford. Would you like to see his photograph?"

"I would," said her ladyship, drily. To her horror, Jane unfastened her gown at the throat and displayed a small locket and chain. She opened the locket and handed it, with a blush, to her grandmama.

"Not a bad-looking person—for his kind," said the Dowager, not at all bad-looking. He has a look of Spence" (Spence was the head footman). "I am sure he is most worthy. But I would not wear him in a locket! It might give stupid people the idea that you were in love with him—and there are so many stupid people! Besides, if it came to his ears he might think the same thing. Young men are so conceited."

"Oh!" said Jane, "I should not like him to think that. I—I do not see how he could. He—he isn't conceited, and—and he is not a bit like Spence!"

"My dear," said her ladyship, "what would you say yourself, if you saw a young girl wearing a man's photograph on her neck? It is not maidenly—in fact, with no desire to hurt your feelings, it is immodest. I appreciate your childish and innocent sentiment in the matter—affection and gratitude are always charming, even when sadly misplaced; but you are no longer a little girl running wild in the

fields. The only person you could wear in that fashion would be your husband, or, in conceivable circumstances, your future husband. But as you have neither one nor the other at present, it is more seemly that your neck should be unfettered. Enjoy your liberty while you may." She smiled her sweetest—and the Dowager could smile like an angel when she chose—but Jane sighed. The chain, however, and the photograph were slipped into her pocket; she could not be immodest, and, no doubt, her grandmama had spoken sound sense.

"Play me that exquisite *Presto*," said the Countess. "I doat on Beethoven when he escapes from that terrible diddledy-diddledy-diddledy in the bass. The Brentmore person really taught you extremely well. Take it at a good pace."

One has not much time to muse on the absent if one is playing a *Presto*, and an active lady marks the time with her cane.

Warbeck was expected to luncheon that same day, and the Countess had given orders that he was to be shown into the library, as she wished a few moments' private conversation with him. Jane, therefore, was half-way through the *Presto* when his lordship's arrival was announced.

"Don't stop playing, my dear," said the Dowager. "I so like to hear music in the distance."

Then she went down to her grandson.

The young man came forward as she entered the room, and seemed surprised, delighted, and relieved to see her walking.

"You must be much better," he said; "I have

been so anxious about you. I hardly dared hope that you were even on the sofa ! ”

“ I am almost myself, dear,” said his grandmother. “ I began to improve from the instant I received your telegram. Sir Claretie says he considers my recovery a miracle. But you are not looking well.”

He was thinner and paler than he had been a fortnight since, and had, in some way, a new expression, an even greater seriousness of manner.

“ You have something on your mind,” said her ladyship, suddenly ; “ you are going to tell me that you are engaged ! ”

Warbeck smiled, but shook his head. “ *Cherchez la femme* is such stale doctrine,” he said.

“ There is no newer doctrine for the old Adam ! ” said the Dowager ; “ but if there is no woman in your news, then it has something to do with religion. Do not say that you have been reading Hooker, and Laud, and the rest of them, and have become High Church ! ”

“ I read Hooker and Laud long ago,” he said, “ but I am not a High Churchman.”

“ Then,” she said, “ you are a Higher Pantheist. Oh dear ! ”

“ To save you further suspense,” he said, “ I am still—nothing. But I have joined a Celibate Brotherhood.”

The Countess did not look shocked, but her aspect was certainly grave.

“ It means, of course, the end of everything—from an ambitious point of view,” she said, slowly.

“ I think,” said Warbeck, “ it means the beginning of everything—from the only point of view worth considering.”

"Quite so," said her ladyship—"quite so. But there is neither wisdom nor virtue in renouncing marriage unless you fully realize what marriage is and what it has to offer. In my opinion it is far more difficult to be a married saint than a saint in the cloisters; Bishop Taylor has pointed this out with much eloquence. Do you think you will never wish to marry?"

Warbeck laughed with the buoyancy of a mortal who has never loved. Before he could reply, the Countess checked him.

"I see," she said, "you know nothing about it. I should feel better satisfied if I knew that you had had some romantic experience. Because if it does not come early—it will come late. And then what trouble! I have seen such unhappiness come of people assuming that because they never have cared for any one, they never will."

"You see," said Warbeck, serenely, "if a man knows that he is under a vow of celibacy the question of sex becomes a dead letter. A woman is merely an individual! The effect of a vow is almost miraculous."

The Countess groaned. "The great thing," she said, "is to be saved from oneself, and oneself so easily passes for a great conviction! See how many young people gabble off the marriage vows: and *their* effect is by no means miraculous."

"Well," said Warbeck, naïvely, "when you consider what a large proportion of humanity take them, you must admit that, on the whole, they observe them very faithfully. Society is so small and the world is so large, one must look at the marriages of the world."

"This brotherhood," she said, "this society, or whatever it is, you have joined, is not, I understand, religious?"

If it was not religious, she thought, one could wriggle out of its ridiculous regulations, and even if it was, one could, in an emergency, change one's religion! She was a lady who only considered impediments for the purpose of destroying them.

"Oh, no," said Warbeck, "its work is purely secular. Dawes, of Balliol, founded it—you know Dawes, of course?"

"Dawes?" said the Countess. "Do you mean the person who lives at Shoreditch and writes to the *Times* about the Athenian Democracy?"

Warbeck nodded his head. "He is a tremendous swell," he said; "he is the sort of genius who lives in seclusion and animates a great public movement. There must always be a grand character of that kind, who can despise fame and use ambitious men as tools."

"Dear me!" said the Dowager; "so you, I presume, are in this Mr. Dawes's tool-basket?"

This was not the way to express an unselfish young man's devotion to a noble cause; he felt this, and was deeply hurt.

"If you like to put it that way," he said, flushing a little, "yes—I am in Dawes's tool-basket. I hope, however, it is not because I am vulgarly ambitious. I only wish to perform my highest duties in the best way. My only object in taking the vow was this—to serve the public well one should have no private interests. In any great governmental crisis one is too often reminded of the man in the parable who had married a wife. It is time some one realized, that self-

sacrifice is the only sure foundation for permanent success."

"H'm," said the Dowager; "very high-minded and most interesting. But the British Constitution does not present any opportunities for martyrdom; at present, no politician can be offered a worse humiliation than a peerage! But that is bad enough, I admit! I have once or twice thought very seriously of dropping my title; it has lost all meaning, and now it is so much more distinguished to be a commoner! But come, I want to introduce you to Jane. She will be charmed with your views; she, too, is full of heroic nonsense."

Jane was still playing when the Dowager and Warbeck came upon her.

"This," said the Dowager, "is your cousin Warbeck."

XII.

IN WHICH A LADY SPEAKS HER MIND.

WHEN Warbeck dropped his cousin's hand, he gave a half-sigh. He never shook hands with either men or women when he could possibly avoid it : he regarded the act as a sign of friendship or affection—not one to be heedlessly given. This idiosyncrasy had made him many enemies, but enemies so created are not to be greatly feared.

Jane's hand was one of her charms ; it was white, delicate in shape, and, what was more, firm, and, what was more than all, very womanly. It seemed made to bestow blessings. Warbeck was extremely sensitive to moral atmosphere : some people made him choke, others gave him new life. He was, therefore, quick to appreciate the young girl's grace and purity, and to appreciate her was to remember his vow. So he half-sighed.

Jane was already what she had promised to be when De Boys left Brentmore—a girl of singular beauty. She had all the brilliance without the self-consciousness of Sophia Jenyns, and for that reason she was, perhaps, less striking at first sight. Sophia never permitted herself to escape attention. Jane did not care whether she was noticed or ignored ; she knew that she was far from plain, (for the pretty girl who is ignorant of her own comeliness does not exist), but

since she had resolved not to think of De Boys as a lover, she had lost all interest in her appearance. At one time, certainly, she had longed to find favour in his sight and so, no doubt, had sent many foolish wishes after the perishable and fleeting attractions of feature and complexion. But this was a weakness of the past—she would never be so vain again—ah, never! At the same time, when she saw her new cousin, she was rather glad that she happened to be wearing her most picturesque gown.

But in spite of the agreeable impression each had produced on the other, the Dowager found them both very dull during luncheon. Warbeck talked on prosaic subjects and rarely addressed himself to Jane. The Countess observed, too, with consternation, that he never once looked at his cousin, but kept his eyes fixed on his plate. She had never seen him so stupid. As for Jane, her shyness was most natural and becoming; she was a girl who could hold her peace without sinking into inanity. It was Warbeck who caused her ladyship uneasiness. Like most determined women she could only be discouraged by time—by the wearing off of enthusiasm, mere facts could not shake her purpose, nor opposition, her courage. The shortest-lived of her projects at least died a natural death, and was immediately succeeded by a direct descendant. Having made up her mind that Warbeck's marriage with his cousin Jane should take place in the autumn, her ladyship regarded his celibate vow as a mere piece of foolery; it had absolutely no bearing on the matter in point. But why was he so depressing in his manner? Had he no eyes? no ears? no taste? no manliness? With all his heroics

had he so little of the hero that he remained like a stock or a stone in the presence of girlhood and beauty? If this was the influence of Dawes of Balliol, the sooner that person was given a colonial appointment the better. He was not wanted in London.

When luncheon was at an end, Jane was obliged to leave them, as she had an engagement to drive in the Park with another new relation—a lady who need not detain us, since she was only remarkable for her visiting list. Warbeck coloured a little when he wished Jane good-bye. “I am afraid, too,” he added, “we shall not meet again for some time. As my grandmother is so much better, I shall return to France to-morrow.” He held the door open for her, and again half-sighed, as, having wished him a pleasant journey, she passed out.

“Warbeck!” said the Dowager, “surely you do not mean that? You are not going away again?”

“I have a great deal of work on hand,” he said, with some awkwardness. “I am preparing one or two speeches and a short pamphlet, and I find I get fewer interruptions in Veronne. It is such a dull little village. There is only one man there I can talk to—Père Villard, the historian. And he is also there for quiet, so we only meet to argue!”

“But,” said her ladyship—“but what do you think of Jane?” She could scarcely conceal her impatience.

“Your letters,” said Warbeck, after some hesitation, “had given me no idea—but I have exchanged so few words with her. I certainly did not expect to see so—so—tall a girl!”

Lady Warbeck had frequently observed that a man’s

language became ambiguous as his sentiments grew unmistakable. She gathered fresh hope.

"I wonder you think her plain!" This was a stroke of genius. It surprised him into candour.

"On the contrary, I think her lovely."

"H'm! But she is not silly with it—she is most intellectual."

"I am sure of it."

The Dowager looked at the ceiling. At some moments one can claim sympathy even from the inanimate.

"She will no doubt marry very well."

The young man frowned. "She is so young yet," he said. "Do not let her make any rash engagement, if you can possibly keep her free. It is so easy to bind oneself, and—and so impossible to escape the consequences. I mean, a promise may be made in all sincerity and after the most serious consideration, yet without fully realizing——" He paused. "I am only saying this," he said, at last, "because a girl takes so much risk—even in the most favourable circumstances—when she marries. Her very innocence is, in a measure, against her."

"It seems to me," said the Countess, drily, "that innocence is against a great many people."

"Not a *great many*, my dear grandmother," he replied, with equal dryness. He got up from his chair and walked to the window. Jane at that very moment came out of the house and stepped into the carriage. He watched her drive away.

"Yes," he said. "I can work much better at Veronne."

The Countess began to wonder whether a celibate

vow might not be a more calamitous invention than she had at first suspected.

"Warbeck," she said, "you will surely think better of—of this arrangement you have made with Dawes?"

"Think better of it!" he repeated. "The time for thinking about it is past. It is now an accomplished fact. My word has been given."

"But I am certain you will regret——"

"It is not a step I would ever allow myself to regret, nor would I place myself in a situation where I might be even tempted to regret it. I made it with the full knowledge that it might possibly involve some slight self-sacrifice. Dawes has been through the mill: he was most careful not to conceal any probable difficulty." He spoke firmly and fixed his eyes on hers with an expression which she recognized as the family stubbornness.

"Ah," said the Countess, quickly, "you think it would be safer to avoid your cousin Jane. That is why you are going back to Veronne!"

"What an absurd idea," said her grandson. "You must think me very susceptible."

"The Shannons are all alike," said her ladyship; "they are icebergs to all women till they meet the right one. And then they melt at a glance. Look at Jane's father—poor Edmund. He saw this Battle's daughter hanging clothes on a line, and fell in love with her on the spot. *Nothing* would make him reconsider it; his obstinacy was simply criminal. But in your case matters are very different. Jane is desirable from every point of view; there is no reason——"

"There is every reason," said the young man, "why we must change the subject. You must forgive me, but I cannot discuss it further."

"I will speak my mind," said the Dowager. "You are ruining your whole life for a whim—a fad—a piece of arrant coxcombery. It is not even religious—you have admitted as much. What can I call it, then, but affectation? In a year's time—less—you will be ashamed to remember it. But in the meanwhile——"

"In the meanwhile," said Warbeck, "I can at least be honourable. And now I think we have talked enough, my dear grandmother. You will be very tired."

"Tired? I am perfectly ill. You have given me my death-blow!" She sank back in her chair, and was evidently far from well. Warbeck knelt down by her side and took her hand.

"You would not have me behave dishonourably," he said; "you don't seem to understand. It—it is not always so easy to do one's duty; is it fair to make it harder? But it must be done in any case."

"Duty!" she said, peevishly. "It will soon be heroic to wear no collar! Foppery! twaddle! That a man in your position, with your responsibilities, with an unblemished title to support, should stoop to such indecent, mawkish, hysterical *balderdash*! It is scandalous!" She sank back again, but summoned her remaining strength for one last blow. "I have lived too long!"

"You are very cruel."

"I have lived too long!" she repeated.

"In a calmer moment, you will see how you have wronged me!"

"Too—long."

"Shall I ring for your maid?"

He was really alarmed—she had changed so much in the last ten minutes.

"Twenty maids could not help me! Warbeck—you have not meant—what you have been—saying?" Her voice was weak; she looked a very old and very feeble woman. And he loved her dearly. "Tell me—you did not—mean it," she repeated.

"I meant it," he said. "I must always mean it."

"But in the circumstances," she gasped, "this Dawes—he would absolve you from—your—promise."

"Dawes!" said Warbeck. "I do not make vows to Dawes—nor swear by Dawes. As I have said, you do not understand how extremely serious a vow of this kind is."

"You distinctly said it had nothing to do with religion," she murmured. "How can it be serious when it has nothing to do with religion?" Her failing eyes were only weak in sight: they could still pierce like needles.

"I can respect religious scruples," she went on, "but I have no patience with any Daweses of Balliols! It is noble, it is saintly to kill your aged grandmother for a Dawes. You do not believe in a God, but you will ruin your family for a Dawes who lives at Shore-ditch! I am tired of life!" Once more she bowed her white head. "The country is going to the dogs—and Daweses!"

"My dear grandmother, will you listen to reason?"

"Reason?" she groaned. "Every bone in my body fairly aches with reason. Ring for Coleman, that I may get to bed!"

He had his hand on the bell when Jane entered : she had returned with some message for the Dowager. When she saw her ladyship's pallid face and Warbeck's distress she looked from one to the other and grew pale herself.

"Grandmama," she faltered, "are you feeling ill?"

"He has killed me," said the Countess, pointing to her grandson, "he has given me my death-blow. I shall never recover." She rose with some difficulty from her chair, and drew herself up to her full height.

"Lean on me," said Jane, with a nice disregard of Warbeck.

"No," said the Dowager ; "henceforth I lean on no one. My staff has failed me when I needed it most. When I can no longer support myself, I must fall. Where I fall, there let me lie. Remain where you are, my dear, I will not be followed. Solitude now is my only refuge !" and this marvellous invalid walked out of the room with grave and majestic steps, leaving Jane and her cousin Warbeck face to face, and alone.

XIII.

IN WHICH ANOTHER LADY SPEAKS HER MIND.

JANE was now able to observe the young man more critically than had yet been possible, and the more she observed him, the greater effort it required to maintain her just indignation at his conduct. For, of course, he must have behaved most brutally. Had not his too fond grandmother implied as much? And if *she* had said so, what could a less partial witness think?

"I suppose," said the girl, in a severe voice, "you will at least remain in London until she is well enough to see you again? You cannot part like this."

"It is a most painful misunderstanding," said Warbeck.

"It is not for me to dictate," said Jane, in a tone of command, "but if it is a misunderstanding you will surely lose no time in making it clear. She is too old for these violent scenes. And she has had a great deal of sorrow and anxiety lately: perhaps she is not so patient as those who are young, and have nothing to worry them but their own want of thought!"

This authoritative and elderly tone in one so young and gentle astonished the Earl, no doubt, but he was so far from feeling any resentment, that he experienced some difficulty in hiding his admiration.

"I have been trying to make it all clear," he said, quietly, "ever since I arrived this noon. The only

trouble is, that she refuses to listen. I have tried to be patient, and I hope I have not spoken harshly. But I must do my duty whether she understands it or not. The quarrel has arisen—I fear we must call it a quarrel—about a question of duty—of honour.”

Jane’s cheeks began to burn : she feared he might think she was inquisitive. And inquisitiveness was not one of her faults.

“Please,” she stammered, “please do not——”

But he, too, was sensitive, and had very delicate feelings.

“I quite understand you,” he said ; “I am only afraid you will not understand *me*. My dear grandmother has a genius for misrepresentation : she can describe what she sees with perfect truthfulness, but she does not see things as they are. In this particular instance it is most unfortunate. For honour has only one aspect : it is not a matter of opinion, but an incontrovertible fact.”

“But she is so honourable herself,” said Jane, eagerly ; “if you are in the right she must agree with you—she must. Are you quite—quite sure that you are right ? It is almost as easy to do wrong for a good motive, as to do right for a bad one. There are always so many reasons why we should follow our own wishes.”

“On the whole,” said the young man, slowly, “I may say there is no danger of any such confusion arising in this case : it is not a matter where my duty is—is perfectly my inclination. If it were not a question of principle—of moral obligation, I—I might surrender.”

“May I tell her that you will reconsider it ?” said

Jane. "There could be no harm in saying that, because the more you consider what is right, the *righter* it seems."

"I cannot re-consider it," he answered, looking away—"I cannot, indeed; I only want to forget it all as soon as possible."

"Don't be angry with me," said Jane, "but for you—that sounds rather—rather cowardly. Oh, I ought not to have said that. I do not know the circumstances. I am always saying something thoughtless. Indeed, I did not mean it."

"You are quite right," he said, "and I am cowardly. But it is one advantage that I know my own weakness: I do not attempt feats beyond my strength." Yet he did not look weak, this man with a square chin and a firm mouth: anything rather than weak. Jane was bewildered.

"My grandmother knows my address," he went on; "but I will find means to hear how she is, even if she does not care to write to me. And—and tell her just this: if it were possible to accept her view, I would be more glad than I could say. But we are nowhere taught that duty is invariably delightful. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Jane.

When she looked again, he was gone. And she was sorry; for he had a winning countenance. If she had never seen De Boys she would have thought him ideally handsome. But De Boys was a king to him—although he was poor and not a person one might wear in a locket!

XIV.

IN WHICH TWO LADIES ACT WITHOUT THINKING.

SOPHIA had resolved to make some appeal to Wrath before the decisive Monday, but she could not resolve on a grievance. To assign jealousy as the cause of her discontent was out of the question. And, as a matter of fact, she did not want to analyze her feelings: she feared calmness as fire might dread water. She only cared to survey her imaginary wrongs with a poetic contempt for base details; she did not choose to torture her heart with questionings, nor demonstrate her husband's innocence by proving herself a fool. So, on Sunday afternoon, she wrote two notes—one to De Boys, the other to her husband.

This was the one to De Boys, which she gave him with her own hands, between the decorous covers of an hymn-book, the same evening:—

“You must tell them that you intend to walk to Barnet station early to-morrow morning, and leave by the eight o'clock train. Your portmanteau and things can be sent after you later. This will save you from the breakfast-table and tedious good-byes. I will meet you at the cross-roads, and we can discuss our future plans during the journey to London. Leave everything to me. For the present, of Boys,

you must return to Oxford and complete your education.—S. J.”

This was the letter to her husband :—

“I have discovered a new meaning in life and a new duty. (Never believe that I will disgrace you.) My weakness—I had almost written my sin—has been my love for yourself. But we were not sent into the world to *love*. Subjectivity is fatal to Art : all great Art is objective. And love is subjectivity in its lowest phase. I use these philosophical terms because they are convenient, and because they are sufficiently comprehensive to cover all subtle—and perhaps agonizing—distinctions. I hope the Madonna will prove your *greatest* work. I will write to Margaret from town. Please tell her this.—Your unhappy SOPHIA.

“P.S.—I shall consult Sir Claretie Mull the moment I reach London. I am perfectly certain that I am consumptive. But do not worry about my health. I feel no pain—only a great sense of *approaching peace*.”

She wept very much over this letter, and felt extremely like the heroine of a psychological romance. To complete the illusion she had taken care to attire herself in flame-coloured silk, made *à la sainte martyre*, with silver cords knotted round her waist, and opals scattered on her breast. She put out the light, and let the moonbeams stream in upon her. It was a grand situation. Musing on her own sublimity and suffering, she fell sound asleep on the couch. Fortunately, the summer-time.

When she awoke it was morning—Monday morning—and half-past six. At that very moment, De Boys, no doubt, was leaving the house. She threw off her garments, plunged into a cold bath (which, perhaps, was unlike a psychological heroine), and dressed herself in clinging black. A large hat and a thick veil gave the final touches to her unimpeachably correct costume. Any fairly well-read observer would have known at once, that she was a misunderstood and cruelly injured woman, about to elope with her only friend.

She opened her bedroom door and peeped out: there was no one in sight. The servants, too, even did so on a visit. At The Cloisters nothing was out of the commonplace. She passed her-footman on her way to the room temporarily arranged as a studio. Neither the maids nor the footman showed the least surprise when they saw her.

She found her letter on the mantelpiece, and fled from the room through the French casement. Wrath had done well, she thought, to turn his odious picture to the wall: she could never have passed it else—the fascination of recognizing Margaret's nose was too engrossing. Under its enchantment, hours sped like minutes.

As she crossed the lawn she cast a glance over her shoulder at Wrath's window. The curtains were not yet drawn: he was probably sleeping—sleeping while she—

A sob—and then for the cross-roads, De Boys, and the Ideal,

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When she awoke it was morning—Monday morning—and half-past six. At that very moment, De Boys, no doubt, was leaving the house. She threw off her garments, plunged into a cold bath (which, perhaps, was unlike a psychological heroine), and dressed herself in clinging black. A large hat and a thick veil gave the final touches to her unimpeachably correct costume. Any fairly well-read observer would have known at once, that she was a misunderstood and cruelly injured woman, about to elope with her only friend.

She opened her bedroom door and peeped out: there was no one in sight. The servants, too, even did she meet them, were accustomed to the habits of celebrities on a visit. At The Cloisters nothing was remarkable but the commonplace. She passed two maids and an under-footman on her way to the room, which had been temporarily arranged as a studio for Wrath. But neither the maids nor the footman showed the smallest surprise when they saw her.

Sophia left her letter on the mantelpiece, and fled from the room through the French casement. Wrath had done well, she thought, to turn his odious picture to the wall: she could never have passed it else—the fascination of recognizing Margaret's nose was too engrossing. Under its enchantment, hours sped like minutes.

As she crossed the lawn she cast a glance over her shoulder at Wrath's window. The curtains were not yet drawn: he was probably sleeping—sleeping while she——

A sob—and then for the cross-roads, De Boys, and the Ideal,

shall be nameless), she explained it without an instant's hesitation.

"She referred to her husband," said the lady, "entirely for the benefit of the grocer's man! She was not even thinking of *you*!"

At which he could only look incredulous. But he was nevertheless impressed by the truth of her assertion.

XVI.

IN WHICH A FARCE IS PLAYED VERY SERIOUSLY.

BREAKFAST was always served punctually at nine o'clock at The Cloisters. As the clock chimed the hour, Lady Hyde-Bassett would descend the stairs, and woe to the guest who was not there to observe her freshness and vivacity. On this one point, she was as unreasonably severe as all malleable men and women are, who make up their minds to be unyielding on, at least, one subject. When she entered the breakfast-room, therefore, on that eventful Monday morning, and saw no Sophia Jenyns, her eyebrows began to twitch. Wrath was reading the *Times*, and Miss Bellarmine was studying a new novel, which dealt with the evolution of the soul from protoplasm to immortality—a work to be attacked when the mind was not predisposed to slumber.

"Where is Sophia?" said Margaret, having wished them both good morning.

"To be sure," said Wrath. "Where is she?"

"I think," said Eliza, slowly, "she has gone for a short walk."

"At this hour," said Margaret, "and without her breakfast?"

"Are you quite sure?" said Wrath.

"I believe," murmured Eliza, "she said last night

that she intended to try an early prowl. Did you not hear her say so ? ”

It was very extraordinary, but neither of them had heard Sophia make the remark.

“ But young Mauden——” began Lady Hyde-Bassett.

She caught a beseeching glance from Eliza, and felt a sharp step on her toe. They were now sitting at the table.

“ Young Mauden,” she went on, calmly, “ was very wise to go by that eight o'clock train.”

“ I wish,” said Wrath, suddenly, “ Sophia would not wander about the country like a Tom o' Bedlam. I know she is studying *Ophelia*, but all the same, it is most annoying ! ”

The two women dared not look up. But they were holding a conversation without words, which is not a difficult feat—although few mortals seem aware of it—when minds are sympathetic, and ordinary means of communication are impossible. To explain this mental phenomenon, however, is work for the metaphysician. We can only say that Lady Hyde-Bassett understood Miss Bellarmine so perfectly, that she lost her appetite for breakfast.

“ Could not some one be sent to her room to inquire ? ” said Wrath, rising from his seat, and oblivious alike of manners, his two companions, and general facts. Thought was swallowed up in sensation, and he recognized the sensation as fear.

“ I will go,” said Eliza.

“ Thank you,” he said ; “ you are very good. Thank you.”

When she had gone out of the room, he turned to

Lady Hyde-Bassett. "Margaret," he said, "do you think I have been blind this last fortnight? Do you think I have seen nothing?"

"Seen—nothing?" she repeated; "how?—what?"

"Do not act," he said; "be a woman—be honest. You have seen all that I have seen—perhaps more."

"No! no! not more . . . it was all very innocent . . . a childish flirtation. . . . I thought it best to ignore it. . . . I would not allow myself to give it consideration."

"Ah! that is what I thought. . . . The question is—Was I wrong? Should I have spoken?"

"No, no. You were right to trust her. The dreadful things we are both fearing are an insult—an injustice. Mauden is the soul of honour. Sophia is light-hearted, but—trust her. Only trust her!"

"I do . . . but . . . where is she now?"

"Do not ask me! Do not ask yourself!"

"Is she with Mauden?"

"No! no! no! how can you say it?"

"Why not ask me how I can say it—and live?"

She took his hand. "Tom," she said, "I would swear that she was innocent even if she told me with her own lips——"

"Innocent!" he said, angrily. "Am I so vile already? I want no man or woman to assure me of my wife's innocence. You know," he went on, after a painful pause, "I am naturally jealous. I—I try to conquer this. . . . I am so many years older than she is, and she is so . . . there is every reason why I must love her, and there are none why she should care for me . . . it would be absurd to expect her to sit gazing at me all day—me, bald, dull, plodding.

... Mauden is her own age, and amusing. . . . It was a crime to marry her: she was a child. She knew nothing about love. She has no idea how much she is to me. I could not tell her, it would frighten her . . . the responsibility——”

“Ah!” said Lady Hyde-Bassett, “why did you not speak out and risk the frightening?”

“I was selfish,” he went on, not hearing, “and thought only of my own happiness. And I persuaded her—— Don’t you understand how I must hate myself? Innocent! She is only too innocent. It is I who am guilty!”

“I wish,” said Lady Hyde-Bassett——“I wish Eliza would make haste.”

“She will not come back,” said Wrath, “because she has found the room empty, and because she, too, thinks——”

Then he left her. And Margaret could only sit with her hands clasped, trying her best not to think. For thinking was not to be trusted at that moment. Faith——“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”——was her only refuge. For there is no virtue so sublime that it cannot be used with advantage even in a comedy situation.

When the grocer stopped his horse at the main entrance to The Cloisters, Sophia got down, gave the man a tip, and lurked under a tree until he had driven out of sight. Then she went out into the road again, and walked to a certain side-door which was cut in the wall of the kitchen-garden, and which was rarely used except by the servants and the men

employed on the estate. She opened this door and found herself face to face with the head-gardener.

"How unlucky!" she exclaimed. "I had just come in to steal some strawberries. Please don't give me any of them, because that would not be the same thing!" And, laughing gaily, she sauntered up the path. The gardener stroked his beard and stared after her. Had not his wife kept him awake the whole of the preceding night, with her "firm beliefs" and "dying breaths" on the subject of Miss Sophia Jenyns? And now she was hankering after strawberries. He whistled.

Sophia, meanwhile, went on her way, rejoicing that she had been able to make such a plausible excuse for entering the grounds by a back-door. She hugged the elusive hope that Wrath had not yet seen her nonsensical letter, and she was now wondering how she could get round to the studio, where, perhaps, if the Fates were kind, she would find the envelope with its seal unbroken. She glanced at the big clock which smiled from the archway of the stable-yard: it was exactly nine. They would all be at the breakfast-table: she could cross the lawn without the smallest risk of meeting either Wrath, or Margaret, or Eliza Bellarmine. Sophia caught up her skirt and ran. Once started, she did not seem able to stop; she had only a frantic notion that she was chasing her own head. The chase ended, however, when she reached the studio window. Her limbs grew heavy and her sight dim; she stumbled over the threshold, and groped her way to the mantelpiece. The letter was gone. She tore off her veil and stared helplessly about the room. Then some-

thing made her look under the clock. It was there, after all. She thrust the hateful thing into her pocket, and fell.

Wrath found her senseless on the floor when he entered the studio a few moments later.

XVII.

IN WHICH A YOUNG GENTLEMAN OWNS HIS UNWORTHINESS.

THE Dowager Countess of Warbeck was confined to her bed for some days after the unhappy disagreement with her grandson. Sir Claretie Mull did not, however, find in her symptoms any grave cause for alarm, and he told the young Earl as much, adding, that if he thought of leaving England, there was no earthly reason why he should not do so. His lordship, therefore, wrote the Dowager an affectionate adieu, expressing his regret that she would not see him, and assuring her of his unalterable love. With kindest regards to his cousin, Lady Jane, he remained ever her devoted grandson, Warbeck.

"Never mention his name in my presence," said the Countess to Jane, after she had read this; "when he repents of his impious conduct, I will forgive him. But until then my only course is to forget."

On the following Monday, she was still weak, but able to lie on the sofa. Jane was reading aloud to her when a visitor was announced in the person of "Mr. Mauden." He had asked to see Lady Jane Shannon.

"You cannot see him to-day," said the Countess, sharply; "it would be most improper. Tell him to come when I am strong enough to receive visitors."

"I am afraid I must see him, dear grandmama," said Jane, with a fine blush, "whether it is proper or not."

"What?" said the Dowager. "A little louder, my love. This attack has affected my hearing." And her blue eyes looked black.

"I said," repeated Jane, without flinching, "I am afraid I must see Mr. Mauden whether it is proper or improper. He is a very old friend."

"Oh!" said her ladyship—"oh! I remember now who he is. The farmer person who is going to be a schoolmaster. See the good creature, by all means!"

The Countess was always most triumphant when she was most defeated.

As Jane ran downstairs to the drawing-room she lost a little of her colour, but when she opened the door, and saw De Boys actually standing on the hearthrug, she grew quite white. He, on his part, blushed as he came forward to meet her.

She gave him her right hand and he took the other. Thus he held them both, nor did he seem anxious to release either.

"Jane," he said, "why have you got this beastly money? and why are you living at this awful Queen's Gate? and—why have you forgotten me?"

"I haven't?"

"But you have. Here is your last letter—all about the South Kensington Museum and Greek vases. I don't want to hear about Greek vases; I want to hear about you. Dear, dear, dearest, why have you got so cultured? why do you quote Browning? why do you write about ideals and all such tiresome rubbish? I would not give your old letters about the guinea-pig

for the whole of Tennyson ! And you have got your hair done differently. Let me see whether I like it ? Yes, I do. Are the sleeves meant to look like a bishop's ? Jane, may I kiss you ? ”

“ No,” said Jane.

Perhaps he did not hear. At all events, it made no difference. And, indeed, she did not seem to think that it would. His kisses were becoming (from his own point of view) agreeably indefinite when she asked a question. This was the question—

“ Did you leave The Cloisters very early this morning ? ”

“ Shall we sit over there by that green dragon ? ” he suggested, gravely.

He chose a chair with its back to the light. Jane sat opposite with the sun shining in on her face. This, he felt, was as it should be. He did not like to see women afraid of the sun.

“ I left The Cloisters this morning,” he said, “ and I return to Oxford this afternoon.”

She checked a sigh ; she certainly could not expect him to waste his time with her.

“ Do you like Lady Hyde-Bassett ? ” she said, trying to look cheerful.

“ Very much,” said De Boys ; “ she is charming. But she is whim-ish, of course, like most women.”

“ And that Miss Bellarmine you mentioned in your last letter ? ”

“ She has a fine figure, but she jaws too much. No one can get a word in, when she takes up an argument. I cannot bear these blue-stockings myself. Fielding's *Amelia* is, in my mind, the highest type of woman ! ”

"You used to say she was insipid."

"Ah, that was a schoolboy's verdict."

"And what about that Miss Sophia Jenyns you mentioned in your first letter? She must have been the most interesting of them all."

"Yes, I think one would call her interesting. In the beginning she reminded me—in a very faint degree—of you. But you have really nothing in common."

"I suppose she is very beautiful?" she sighed. "Grandmama says she is the loveliest actress in Europe."

"She is lovely—for an actress," he said; "there is a glamour about her which some people might find very attractive. . . . But I have nothing to say against her. She is rather uncertain in temper; not a woman one could depend on. She has no feeling. And what is a woman—no matter how pretty she may be—unless she has feeling? I would call Miss Jenyns an egoist; very fascinating, but for all that, an egoist. And egoism is, I think, the eighth deadly sin. It is the special sin of this century. But, Jane, don't let us talk of -Isms and -Ivities. I am sick of them, dearest. One heard of nothing else at The Cloisters. An enervating atmosphere! If I had been there another week I should have lost all ambition. I feel as though I had stepped from a window conservatory into the fresh woods. In God's name, let us be natural; let us drop jargon; let us only remember that we love each other—for nothing else matters."

"Are you sure you won't get tired of me? I am not clever and intellectual. I understand you, dear, but I cannot answer properly. It—it is horrid to feel so ignorant when you find yourself ~~talking to—to~~

some one who is accustomed to meet geniuses, and men—and women—who can say something about everything, and just in the right way. Now I suppose if I tried I could say something, too, but it wouldn't sound a bit like the conversation in novels. I always think in such short words ! ”

“The perfection of literary style—or of conversational style—is to be simple,” said De Boys—“simplicity is delicious, and lamentably rare. I should hate a wife who could turn me into an epigram.”

“A wife ! ” she murmured.

“Dearest, you are the only woman in my world. The rest are your reflection ; when I see any beauty or charm in a woman it is because she reminds me of you.”

Jane blushed. “I think I can understand that,” she said, “because, after you had left Brentmore, I used to talk to Henry Burkett—the one who sings in the choir—and—and sometimes I used to forget, and think he was you. But I soon found the difference. You are not angry with me ? ”

“Burkett is such a smug ! ”

“But I missed you so terribly ! And I never looked at him when I could help it. When I did look I used to half-close my eyes. That made him more indistinct.”

“Still, I do not care to think that you have flirted with men. If any one else had told me——”

“It wasn't flirting, De Boys. We only talked about books, and poetry, and religion, and things like that. I hope you don't think——”

“I 'am quite sure, dearest, that your intentions in the matter were beyond reproach. At the same

time, religion is rather an intimate subject ; I mean, it covers everything or anything. If you begin a conversation on religion there is no saying how it will end. It would entirely depend on the view you happened to take. For this reason, it is not a subject for a young girl to discuss with strange men ; nor, in fact, with any man except her husband—or some clergyman of whom he approved."

"A girl must say something," said Jane, whose meekness had its limit ; "what did Miss Jenyns talk about ? She is only two years older than I am."

"Miss Jenyns," said Mauden, "is a woman of the world. Some day I will tell you more about her. But now I want to hear about you. I must leave in half an hour."

"So soon ?" said Jane. "I wish you had told me you were coming. I should have had so much happiness watching for you."

"I—I came here on impulse, my dearest. I—I—did not know myself that I was coming to see you when I left The Cloisters this morning. But when I reached London, I found I could not leave it until I had——" He stopped short, struggled with his conscience, and then blurted out—"Jane, I want you to forgive me for something."

"Forgive you ?" she said, "what have you done ?" and she kissed his hand.

"I am the meanest beast that walks," said her hero, blushing to his finger-tips—"I am, indeed. I do not deserve——" She smiled into his face with angelic disbelief. "I do not deserve you," he said, "and I have always known it." He sighed—"I am afraid we cannot marry for a year or two ?"

"Not for ages!"

"And then, there is your money!"

"I can give most of it to the poor relations. It will soon go that way. They want ever so many more things than I do! But you will be rich, too, when you are a Professor and write learned books. Or, if you are not exactly rich, you will be famous—which is much better."

"You have always believed in me. But if I fail——"

"You would never fail; you might be unfortunate. But then I could only love you more than ever."

"Write to me every day, dearest, and tell me that."

"How much do you love me?"

"I don't know," he said, solemnly; "and that has been the cause of all my trouble."

"What trouble?"

"The trouble I want you to forgive."

She put her arms round his neck. "Didn't you say," she said, "that nothing mattered so long as we loved each other?"

"It would never have happened," he stammered, "if she had not been so much like you."

"I know all about it," she said; "don't tell me any more—unless you like."

"But—how do you know?"

"I saw it in your face—when I came in."

"I shall never understand women!" exclaimed De Boys,

"I suppose," she said, "we *are* rather difficult."

"I never told her," he murmured, "that I loved

her. It—it was only sympathy. . . . And, Jane—never write me cold letters again.”

“Do you think I could—after this?” said his affianced.

And so, I think, we may leave them.

XVIII.

IN WHICH SOPHIA WAKES UP.

MANY hours of pain and several weeks of dangerous illness were the result of Sophia's bite at the Ideal—a result which must not surprise us, since the psychological mystery she tasted is, as all pious souls know, the modern development of the antediluvian apple. But Sophia was young and had much to live for—much, too, to atone for. Tears had washed the dust from her eyes as only tears can, and, as she wept over her own folly, she knew that she was really crying for the first time in her life. Crystal drops shed over our own excellence are nothing in the world. They may, however, have their use in the city that is paved with good intentions.

Wrath watched day and night by the bedside of his wife. Their relationship was no longer concealed, for Nature, who hates false appearances, and is, in fact, a very blab to those who have ears to hear, had made straightforwardness necessary. And Wrath, in spite of his anxiety, was happier than he had been, even at his happiest moments, since the day of the secret marriage. He held his breath at the shortness of time before him in which to retrieve the two past years of dissimulation, of double-facedness. As all penitents, he longed to be born again, that he might wage a new life with the arts of an old experience. He blamed

himself less for keeping his promise to Sophia than for making it. The weakness, the moral cowardice of the matter lay, in his judgment, in the submitting to such a condition. It brought him no ease of mind to remember that the lunatic, the lover, and the poet were admitted by a charitable world to be more or less irresponsible for their follies. With all his faults he was not a man to lie pleasantly to his own conscience. He had acted wrongly, and he knew it ; what was more, he had been perfectly aware that he was acting wrongly when he gave the miserable promise. He had made up his mind to marry Sophia, and he had not been willing to run any risk of losing her. There was no condition so unwise, so ill-considered, or so desperate but he would have accepted it, rather than forfeit even one of her smiles. Such was the truth. (If a man cannot be a hero to his hired valet, we must not wonder if he looks small in the presence of his free conscience.) Fear, for the enormities he might have committed, was the other side of his remorse for the wrong, he had actually done. It was an awkward subject viewed from any point of consideration. But awkward as it was, it was even grateful in comparison with another matter, which haunted him constantly, and which seemed past forgiveness or hope. This matter was his conversation with Lady Hyde-Bassett on that never-to-be-forgotten Monday morning. It was contemptible enough, God knew, to have suspected his saintly wife of having eloped with Mauden ; but to have expressed the despicable thought in words, to have allowed the curbed jealousy of a lifetime to break away from all bounds just when control was most necessary—what

could he call himself? To think of all this in the long hours of the night, when Sophia was lying half-unconscious, or in pain, was a terrible punishment for his injustice, but he would not own that it was terrible enough.

One afternoon Sophia woke up from a sleep and found Wrath watching her. It was a daily experience, but on that particular afternoon she seemed to see him more distinctly than usual. He was looking old and careworn, and was so changed, that she found herself wondering whether she had not lost all idea of time, and whether her illness had lasted—not a few weeks as she imagined—but many years. She asked Wrath for a hand-glass,—she thought her hair must be grey.

He gave it to her in silence. She looked from the mirror to her husband, and from her husband to the mirror. Her face had not suffered so much from illness as his, from anxiety. She was pale in the cheeks, and a little dark round the eyes, but otherwise she seemed even younger for her suffering. She might have been a girl in her first teens.

"Tom," she said, "are you very tired?"

"Tired? Oh, no."

"Then talk to me. Tell me what you are thinking about."

"I am thinking of you," he said, quietly.

"Don't think about *me*—I am horrid."

This was quite in her old manner, and for a moment he smiled. It was a long-established custom between them, that she should call herself names, while he expressed his horror at the blasphemy. It was the usual prelude to most of their conversations.

"But I really mean it to-day," she said. This guileless and unconscious admission of the usual insincerity of her self-depreciation made them both laugh. It was Sophia's saving grace that she could, at times, survey herself from a distance. When she was not the first, she would at least be the second, to mock at her own extravagancies. But it may be that she carried this self-ridicule to excess, and saw her actions in a ludicrous light when they were rather sad than funny. Thus she had gradually lost all belief in her own earnestness. Sometimes it seemed that her love for Wrath was a jest, that life and death were alike jests, that the world itself was the Creator's big joke with mankind. Everything was so grotesque, so badly rehearsed. The curtain went up too soon and came down too late; parts were mumbled, or shouted, or gabbled, or left unspoken; cues were disregarded; heroes were knock-kneed, and heroines had thick ankles; fools made mirth with such a solemn air, and the wise were solemn so foolishly; men and women seemed not themselves, but their caricatures; it was all wildly comic, farcical, unnatural, and inartistic. The only sad part was, that one ached from laughing till one cried at the pain. But this, too, was a joke.

There was something inhuman, almost cruel, in Sophia's humour which made Wrath unhappy—all but fearful. Men, moreover, do not like their wives to have too clear a perception of the ludicrous—it is a masculine theory that laughter must be on the male side only. A man knows when laughter is a spoilsport; he can postpone it when necessary. But a woman will laugh—if she know how—at the right

moment or the wrong, usually, too, when a man would prefer to see her demure.

Although Wrath joined in his wife's merriment on this particular afternoon, it did not seem to him that the occasion was especially amusing.

"Things are still so ridiculous," she said, suddenly, "but they are not ridiculous in quite the same way as they used to be. When I laugh now, I do not feel so much like crying. I know that what looks so absurd at present, will one day be very grand and beautiful. Some kinds of knowledge you cannot study—you find them when you are looking for something else. I have learnt all this by accident. I cannot tell you how. But I have learnt it so well that I can never forget it. . . . I shall never again be so foolish—so obstinate as I was. You will see such a difference in me! And, Tom—I want to tell you about my walk—that morning."

"No, no!" he said; "let me tell you something first. Will you ever forgive me? I—I thought you were with Mauden!"

The clock had never ticked so loudly: Sophia could hear nothing else. Or was it her own heart?

"I thought you were with Mauden," he repeated. "I thought you had gone to London with him. I—I was brutally jealous——"

"Tom!"

"I knew it was infamous. Do you think I will ever forgive myself?"

"But, Tom——" What would he say if he knew the whole truth? She could atone for her folly none the less because he knew nothing about it. Besides, he would lose all respect for her if she told him. He

would despise her : perhaps his love would change to dislike. Men, even the best, were not so forgiving as women.

"Tom," she said, desperately, "you—you were quite right. I *was* with Mauden—I *was* going to London with him, but—but I changed my mind ! It was all a mistake. I thought—you were tired of me ! "

She trembled for his answer. He had grown so pale ; he looked so stern.

"You were going to London with Mauden ? " he said.

"Yes."

"Why did you change your mind ? "

"Because—I remembered *you*."

"You remembered me ! That was thoughtful."

He drew his hand across his brow and bowed his head. We have surely never such need to show humiliation as when we are in the presence of a fallen idol.

It is not the god, which was no god, that suffers, but its former worshipper, who sees what appeared divinity, corruption, and what looked strength, rottenness. And, in at least some slight degree, this terrible contemplation must be made by all mortals who place their entire faith in mere flesh-and-blood : who love the creature, which has beauty that we may desire it, more than the Creator whom no man hath at any time seen. One who wrote of human affection with a tenderness and understanding past comparison—who knew its infinite power and no less infinite weakness—one who has taught that by loving man we best learn how to love his Maker, has also warned us—
"Keep yourselves from idols."

Wrath, in his hour of disillusion, had no words : the tragedy in common life lies in the thinking—not in the speaking.

The sound at last reached him of a woman, crying ; he looked, and though he no longer beheld a heavenly spirit, infallible and sinless, he beheld his wife.

"You forget—the circumstances," sobbed Sophia. "I was not well. And think how ill I have been !"

His frown vanished, but it left its scar. "My dearest," he said, gently, "whatever has happened, I know it has all been my fault ! My fault entirely ! I shall never cease to reproach myself."

"Let me tell you all about it," said Sophia ; and then between laughter and tears she confessed the whole story. "Poor young Mauden is not to blame," she wound up, "because he did not know I was married !"

"My fault entirely !" repeated Wrath. And what a relief it was to shift all her burden on his own shoulders ! He was the transgressor—the brute beast with no understanding—she was still his angel of light.

"You are so good to me," she whimpered, "but I will never be so wicked again."

"There shall be no more of these detestable circumstances," he said.

"I don't mind them so much, if I know what they mean," said Sophia, "and next time, of course, I shall know ! Some day I want to have a son, and I want him to be just like you !"

"It is impossible to look into the future," said Wrath ; "but if—by any chance—we had a son, I think he would be rather remarkable."

"He would be a genius," said Sophia.

"But he must have your face," said Wrath.

"No," said Sophia, "if he is not exactly like you, I shall be disappointed."

"I think," said Wrath, "we must make him a lawyer. He might become Lord Chancellor."

"Or he might be a Cardinal. Wouldn't that be nicer?"

At which moment, Lady Hyde-Bassett came in with some flowers for the invalid.

"Margaret," said Sophia, "if you had a son, would you rather see him a Cardinal or a Lord Chancellor? Because we were just saying——"

Wrath strode away to the window. And looking out, he saw a fair world. How wrong it was to be cynical! As if there was no such thing as earthly happiness. Away! away! ye philosophers of the mud-heap. The soul of man is a garden where, as he sows, so he shall reap. If ye would gather roses, do not sow rotten seeds. Away! away!

EPILOGUE.

WHEN Lady Jane Shannon attained her one-and-twentieth year she married the brilliant young scholar De Boys Mauden who, at present, is editing Plato as he has never been edited before, and never will be, again. As this magnificent enterprise will occupy some nine hours each day for the next thirty years of his life, we may safely assume that much fame will accrue to his literary executors.

The Earl of Warbeck astonished society by becoming first a Roman Catholic, and then a priest. This did not kill his grandmother, as many people feared it might, but she lived many years to enjoy the pleasure of writing wills in his favour, and revoking them at the rate of three a month. He also dined with her frequently, because, as she told her friends, she would never despair of converting him back to Christianity and the usual number of commandments.

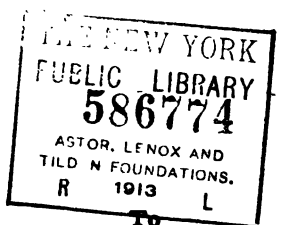
Farmer Battle and Miss Caroline Battle are still living, and rank next in Jane's heart after De Boys and a certain small edition of De Boys. This young gentleman already holds a decided opinion on the due subjection of women to their lords: an opinion which Jane has her own method of refuting—a method so subtle, however, that Mauden has never yet been able to perceive it. He is only conscious that his wife's will looks so much like his own, that he is never able to tell which is which. He, at all events, gives the

word of command and she always wears an air of the most charming obedience. Why analyze such an harmonious condition of things?

Lady Hyde-Bassett lived long enough to see her dear Eliza married to Mr. Claverhouse Digges, the editor of the *Argus*. It was the last match Margaret made, and, as she declared, the most satisfactory. She died very peacefully—if rather suddenly—and her last words were, that she had never been so happy. It was quite impossible to mourn over one who showed such relief at leaving this world, and who enjoyed such a full and perfect assurance of the next. Her great wealth was left as a bequest to be used for the support of such scholars, authors, and artists, who preferred rather to do good work for nothing than bad work for large fees. The bequest is now managed by a committee, and it has not been of service to those for whom her ladyship intended it. But her intentions were good, and the starving scholars, authors, and artists who see the prosperous, incompetent, and dishonest making off with their treasure, have, let us hope, none the less gratitude for Lady Hyde-Bassett's benevolent design.

Wrath and Sophia have a small daughter, and now they wonder why they wanted a son. She is such an amazing and unique creation. They have named her "Margaret," after one they both loved—but Wrath especially. Had she not believed in Sophia when he himself had doubted her?

A BUNDLE OF LIFE



WALTER SPINDLER.

Ah, not for me—to learn the truth by dreaming,
To hear the cries of earth in melody,
To know 'tis night but when the stars are gleaming,—
Ah, not for me.

Music of form and colour's mystery,
The joy of fashioning in fairest seeming
Life's dullest clay and Winter's barest tree;

To count the years as moments—only deeming
That truly Time which makes thy Art to thee
The one thing needful and the all-redeeming,—
Ah, not for me!

September 23, 1893.

A Bundle of Life.

PROLOGUE.

I.

SIR SIDNEY WARCOP was a gentleman who had been born with many good and perfect gifts, but he had pawned them to his Adversary for a few casks of brandy and a little soda. In his early manhood he had been considered a handsome, dashing young buck of the old school, a three-bottle hero, a sad dog, an irresistible rake—a good-hearted devil. Now he was reformed, and reformation had meant in his case, as in that of many, the substitution of many disagreeable virtues for a few atoning sins. Once over-generous, he was now frugal; once fearless, he was now discreet; once too loving, he was now indifferent; once a zealot, he was now unprejudiced; once candid, he was now abysmal—in a phrase, he was the embodiment of gentlemanly correctness, well-bred honour, and polite religion.

At the age of six and twenty he had surprised society in two ways: first, by running away with his enemy's wife; and secondly, by marrying the lady on the death, some months later, of her distracted

husband. Eighteen years had now passed and, by living in close retirement, Lady Warcop was become a much-sought-after person. She had suddenly inherited, too, a considerable fortune, and as views on marriage are only immoral (as it would seem) when one cannot afford to pay for them, it was not so much a question whether her ladyship would be received, but whether she would receive. And she gave such delicious dinners ! The early transgression of Sir Sidney and his wife was forgotten, and their daughter (whose age was a subject delicately avoided by the feeling and discreet world), was receiving her education in a convent abroad. It is possible that she would have remained there always and ended her life as a nun, but for the great interest most unexpectedly shown in her welfare by a rich and childless aunt—her mother's own sister—Mrs. Constance Charlotte Portcullis.

The heart of Mrs. Portcullis was, as it were, a moral scent-sachet, which she refilled with the fashionable perfume of each season, scattering the musk of the old year to make room for the myrrh of the new. This custom—which is commonly called Toleration—won for her numberless acquaintances of every rank and opinion, among whom it would have been hard to decide, which expressed his or her contempt for the lady's uncertain principles, in the most affectionate manner. Mrs. Portcullis had, nevertheless, one fixed and unalterable idea, and that had reference to Lady Warcop. She held that her appalling conduct had brought perpetual disgrace on that distinguished family the Tracy Tottenhams, of which she and her ladyship were members. Years passed and the sisters

never met. Mrs. Portcullis, of Belgrave Square, and Lady Warcop, of Curzon Street, were a new heaven and a new earth asunder.

They were brought together at last in a street accident. Mrs. Portcullis was thrown out of her victoria and driven home half insensible in Lady Warcop's brougham, which, by a dispensation of Providence or the interference of Satan, happened to be passing at the time of the catastrophe. On recovery from the shock Charlotte felt constrained to write to her sister in pious and forbearing terms—

“Since the Almighty,” she wound up, “has, in accordance with His inscrutable Principles, chosen a weak and sinful agent for the accomplishment of His all-merciful design (the preservation of my life), I must accept this as a sign that He desires me to unbend from my former attitude of just, if reluctant, severity. If He has seen fit to forgive you for the disgrace and reproach you have brought on our once stainless name, my duty as a Christian forbids me to make any further comment on your crime. But I cannot refrain from adding that my unceasing prayers for your repentance have no doubt furthered, more than it would become me to say, this miracle of grace.

“I will receive you this day week between two and four.

“Your affectionate sister,
“C. C. PORTCULLIS.”

Like Lady Lurewell in the comedy, Mrs. Portcullis could dress up a sin so religiously that the devil him-

self would hardly know it of his making. It is certain that she deceived herself, and on reading over the foregoing she almost felt the prick of her immortal wings—which prick, as Plato tells us, is to the soul what the cutting of teeth is to the infant. But Lady Warcop's state of mind on receiving the letter, and her consequent remarks to the effect that Charlotte always was a hypocrite, a cat, and a fool, need not be insisted on here ; for, remembering Charlotte's wealth and several other matters, she wrote her reply in so meek and quiet a spirit that the hasty utterances of her unconsidering tongue shall not be known till the last Judgment. Although, as we have said, Lady Warcop had gained for herself a certain sneaking acknowledgment from so-called good society, her own sister's refusal to recognize her had always been a stumbling-block. There were still many desirable acquaintances who would not wink until Mrs. Portcullis winked, and this consideration was of such moment to Blanche, who only lived now to meet the right people in the right way, that, rather than miss the chance of reconciliation with Charlotte, she would have performed even a more severe penance than did Henry II. at the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. So giving much incidental praise to the Creator, but much more to Mrs. Portcullis, she wrote to say that she would call at Belgrave Square on the day and between the hours named in Charlotte's most kind letter, and, begging her to continue her fervent supplications to Heaven, she remained her devoted, if unworthy, sister Blanche. She displayed very correct taste, Charlotte thought, in omitting the ill-gotten name of Warcop.

II.

Lady Warcop was a woman of medium stature, elegant mould, and cautious smiles. Deep-set blue eyes and a very low brow, a nose inclined to the Roman, and a telling mouth ; a smooth, rather pale complexion and innocent fair hair were the most remarkable points of a countenance which fascinated reason and looked reproach at distrust. At least seven years younger than Sir Sidney, and of singularly youthful appearance, she affected an artless manner and displayed now that childish merriment not seen in children, and now that rudeness which passes for sincerity and is usually found in the disingenuous. A being with many emotions but no heart, with ideas but no thoughts, there was so little, even in her folly, to excite interest, that, in calling her stupid, friends said their best and enemies their worst of her character. But the strong force in Lady Warcop was her sex : weak, untruthful, cowardly, and malicious, she was still no more than woman may be, and it was no slight virtue—though a negative one—to have kept this feminine quality, to have retained—after a life of sham passions and passionate shams—that indefinable Eve-like pathos which from the beginning conquered—and until the end will conquer—the rigour of strict criticism.

Mrs. Portcullis, on the other hand, was big-boned, loud-voiced, and mighty, and so aggressive in her merits that she would have been more acceptable and pleasant for one of Lady Warcop's cowering faults. Her high, white forehead and long chin gave her a

grand and monumental air, which her widow's cap, crape robes, and such-like paraphernalia of woe made the more emphatic.

The meeting between these two ladies, who had hated each other so long and so cordially, was of the most edifying and tender nature. Blanche, who had intended to be dignified though pious, fell to miserable weeping, and Charlotte, touched by what she supposed was the sacrifice of a contrite heart, pronounced, goddess-like, a solemn benediction on Blanche's bowed head. Lady Warcop's tears, however, were those of suppressed rage and spite, and Charlotte's comfortable words, "I will make no reference to the past," sent her into fresh spasms of grief. She remembered every quarrel of their earliest childhood: how Charlotte had always been the "good" one, the "forgiving" one, the one "who would grow up a comfort to her parents," the one who conscientiously picked plums out of her cake because they were bad for her—which plums, by-the-bye, she used to drop on the plate of the less self-controlled Blanche. Not vainly, alas! But then, Charlotte did not like the taste of plums, preferring caraway seeds! The plum story loomed big in Lady Warcop's brain, and she howled—not for her own sins, but at the remembrance of Charlotte's treachery some thirty years before, when they both wore pinafores, and were only learning to be hypocrites.

"I would not have known you," sobbed her ladyship, "how you have changed! What trouble you must have had! Oh, Charlotte! and to meet after all these years—two old women! When I was last

in this room you wore a mauve silk and it went so well with your complexion—you used to have such a beautiful colour and there was not a line on your face—or at least there were only a few ; but now—who would think you were the same creature ! ”

“ You are more fortunate than I am,” said Mrs. Portcullis, smiling horribly, “ for you have a grown-up daughter to remind us of your lost attractions ! ”

Blanche gasped, but although she felt the weight of Charlotte’s blow she was not sufficiently skilled herself to appreciate its science.

“ Oh,” she said, growing red, “ do you mean Teresa ? ”

“ Surely,” quoth her sister, in a tone of horror, “ there is but one I could mean ! ”

Lady Warcop lifted her eyes and gazed as bravely as she dared at the miniature of the late William Duncan Portcullis which reposed on Charlotte’s adamantine breast. This miniature, however, only served to produce in Blanche the kind of panic which we may suppose would fill any weak creature who saw scalps adorning the person of a warlike adversary.

“ Tell me about Teresa,” said Mrs. Portcullis, choosing the subject most humiliating to her sister.

“ She is at school.”

“ I understood she was in a convent.”

“ Yes,” faltered Lady Warcop, “ there is a school in the convent ! ”

“ From a Romish point of view such equivocation, I know, is not considered disgraceful. Our religion, thank God, is not so easy ! You must send for her at once. She is, if I remember rightly, eighteen and a half, and, not to hurt your feelings, she can only

retrieve the lamentable circumstances of her birth by making a good marriage. Although we have not met, my dear Blanche, you have been ever in my mind, and the alteration in my appearance which you find so startling is, no doubt, miraculously evident to you because your disgrace has been its sole cause. Blessed with the kindest of husbands and a good conscience, I have had, nevertheless, a constant sorrow—that sorrow was my sister's shame. Oh ! do not suppose I utter this as a reproach ! I name it because I think my long years of grief give me the right to express a very strong opinion on the subject of your unhappy child's education and future. Your own sense will tell you that she must be guarded far more strictly than other girls. For instance, she must not be seen at balls, theatres, race-courses, country houses, or the like, but must rest content with dinners, oratorios, and good works for the poor."

"You are too kind," said Lady Warcop, who had listened with astonishing patience to her sister's speech, "but I do not wish Teresa to leave the convent at present. She is extremely happy there, and I can only wish that at her age I might have found such a peaceful home far removed from the temptations and wickedness of this deceitful world ! As for her marrying, I have too much reason to regret my own early marriage—the cause of all my trouble—to wish the poor child to risk a similar mistake."

"You did not leave dear Douglas for a richer man !" said Mrs. Portcullis, in a tone which implied that if Blanche had made a more discreet choice, her sin would have been less odious.

"Perhaps not," said Blanche ; "but I left a man who did not understand me for one who—— You know, Charlotte, that Sidney could make himself very agreeable. There were many women who would have been far readier than I was to run away with him. Indeed, he has often said that it was my resistance which chiefly excited his admiration, and if I had not been so firm on *my* side, he would not have been so determined on *his*. I saw that from the first, and I cannot tell you the *hours* we spent arguing the matter from every possible point of view. He used a great deal of persuasion (and you may be sure I would not have wasted a thought on him if he had not), but I took the final step with great reluctance. We may have been foolish, but we meant no wrong. I was unhappy ; he was kind to me ; we were both young."

"Sir Sidney was certainly young," said Mrs. Portcullis. "As for you, I can make no excuse on the ground of your age, for I always blame the woman in such cases, and, to my mind, it does not matter in the least whether she be sixteen or sixty. But it is a subject I must refuse to discuss with you, since, in the nature of things, it is inexpressibly painful to me. Let us return to the pressing and all-important question of Teresa's future. I would suggest that you send for her at once, and then you may bring her with you to a small dinner I am giving on the twentieth. The Dundrys, the Paget-Herons, and a few other old friends of mine are coming."

Blanche, who had been hopelessly hoping these many years for a smile of recognition from the Lady Dundry (known among her intimates as

"Arabella, dowdy, but exclusive"), no sooner heard that magic name than her whole demeanour changed. The little dignity and resolution she had assumed fell like a veil, and it was soon agreed between the two women that Teresa should be sent for on the morrow.

"The nuns must bring her to London," said Blanche, "for Sidney hates the Channel, and it is death to *me*."

Yet she had crossed it on the great occasion of her elopement.

III.

Four days after this interview between Lady Warcop and her sister, Sir Sidney might have been seen making his way towards Bedford Row. In person he was unusually handsome, his head and features reminding one in a striking degree of the popular representation of Cicero, while his extraordinarily brilliant blue eyes and lively hair did full justice to his Celtic origin. As in the case of Agamemnon, there were many men taller than he, but in a crowd he was not to be matched for grace and majesty of movement. There was, however, a certain studied ease in his gestures, a premeditated charm in his manner, which to those who disagreed with his politics made insincerity seem the sincerest thing about him. But if he had not a guileless soul, he had at least immaculate linen, which so dazzled the spectator by its purity that to a cynical mind it might have seemed that in this generation a good laundress is more useful than a clean record.

When Sir Sidney entered the private office of Mr. Robert Waddilove (of the firm of Waddilove, Shorn-

cliffe, Shorncliffe, and Pride, Solicitors), Mr. Waddilove rose from his chair, bowed, and remembered the time when he would have called on his client and trifled away a pleasant morning with scandal, choice cigars, incomparable sherry, and a "little matter of business," which came last and was invariably left "to your discretion, Waddilove." But now, oh heavy change! Even as the Baronet entered he looked at his watch.

"Not detain you ten minutes," he said, speaking rapidly, and as though he were dictating a telegram. "Not legal, but domestic. Wife most annoying. Teresa coming home. Wife in hysterics every time girl's name is mentioned. No living in the house."

Waddilove rubbed his chin. He was a man of middle age, short, but so compactly built that to look at him made one think of bricks and cement. His quick brown eyes were remarkable for their curiously mingled expression of shrewdness, scepticism, and good humour, and his wry mouth showed that if he drank in life like a worldling, he swallowed it like a philosopher. His nose was of the penetrating order, and seemed to have jutted prematurely from his forehead, which was broad and thoughtful.

His under-lip twitched a little at the close of Sir Sidney's remarks. "We will call this a friendly chat," he said quietly.

"Eh?" said the Baronet, with a radiant air, "not professional? Well, after all, it is not a legal matter. But you are quite sure? Still, between such old friends any question of business and that sort of thing is unpleasant. Conversation becomes restrained at once." He chose a chair, and sat in statuesque ease.

"You know what women are," he said.

Waddilove closed his eyes as though he would exclude a painful vision.

"You know what my wife is," continued Sir Sidney.

The lawyer looked grave, in the formal manner appropriate to the discussion of family skeletons—a manner not so much indicative of pity, which might verge too much on the familiar, as of concern—disinterested, brain-felt concern.

"I have nothing to say against Lady Warcop," said her husband. "She has many excellent qualities, but on the subject of Teresa she is a—what-do-you-call-'em?"

"An enigma," suggested Waddilove, but in a voice so modulated that had the word been unwelcome it might have passed for a cough.

"That is the thing," said Sir Sidney, "an enigma. And to turn against her own daughter, her only child! She has not seen her since she was born; there has always been some excuse. But now she has suddenly sent for her, and God knows why, for no sooner had she written the letter than she declared she would not have her in the house. Damn it all! it is *my* house and *my* daughter! When a man cannot have his own way in his own house, then—then it comes to this—somebody must give in. If I say, 'Blanche, I am going to put my foot down,' she begins to cry. She says, too, that her hair is turning grey with silent worry. And you know, Waddilove, she is never silent, and she is no longer so young that a grey hair or two seems extraordinary. But there are quarrels between us from morning till night, and I cannot allow it. Life is not worth living. Why

did she send for the girl if she did not want her? Where's the consistency? As I told Blanche this morning—"Blanche," I said, as kindly as possible—I did not want a scene, as you may imagine—"Blanche," I said, 'if you will tell me why you sent for Teresa, in the first place'— But, God bless your soul! before the words were out of my mouth she flew at me like a tigress. And what do you think she said? 'What! do you begrudge your own child her rightful home? I suppose you do not wish to be reminded of the past. For it was all your fault, although I have had all the blame.' Imagine her referring to dead and gone matters in that offensive manner! And she was the one who had been abusing the poor child—not I. I ask you what could any man do with a woman like that?"

"It is a very difficult question," said Waddilove.

"And there is nothing to be gained by a separation," said Sir Sidney, "because she is so unreasonable, and can neither make head nor tail of the law. There is no peace for me this side of the grave."

"What does Lady Warcop suggest?" said Waddilove. "What are her wishes in the matter?"

"God knows!" said Sir Sidney. "If I knew what she wanted we might come to some understanding. But one moment she says one thing and the next another. My health will not bear it much longer. What do you advise me to do in the meantime?"

"You must be firm," said Waddilove.

"Impossible; quite impossible. Whenever I speak firmly she begins to cry. You see, she is a gentle, sweet-tempered sort of woman by nature. One does not like to be brutal."

"Have you tried persuasion?"

"I have tried everything—coaxing, threatening, commanding, and exhorting; jokes, presents, theatres, and sermons; reading, singing, playing, and, so far as that goes, praying. No husband could do more to make his wife happy—unless, indeed, he blew his brains out!"

"I am afraid," said Waddilove, "you must make up your mind to endure these annoyances."

Sir Sidney sighed heavily and rose from his chair. "Before I married her," he said, "she was as mild as an angel. She was a little contrary now and again, but one kind word, and she would do anything. Douglas Cockburn never understood that, and tried bullying. Now I see, however, that there were faults on both sides. Of course, I would not say as much to any one else. This is a judgment on me, Waddilove, and if I did not know it was a judgment I could not bear it another day. As it is, I will face it out to the bitter end. Good-bye."

He left the office with the uneasy idea that he had been talking too freely, and, as a consequence, he began to hate Waddilove as a prying, impertinent fellow—a fellow to be avoided. What right had he to ask so many questions? But it had been a relief to speak out: to utter his feelings; to rid himself even by a straw's weight of that load of sorrow, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and weariness, the bearing of which, after all, proved that his poor fragment of a soul had still its use in the scheme of salvation.

IV.

Lady Warcop, meanwhile, was pacing the floor on her boudoir. In her hand she held the photograph of a singularly plain little girl, who stood in a cork grotto staring at a stuffed dog. This portrait of Teresa had been taken some ten years before, and Blanche had lacked the courage to send for another. And now, without warning, to be obliged to present *this* to the world! It was too hard, too bitter, too outrageous. Was ever woman called upon to suffer such mortification? As for motherly feelings, what were they? How could she love a creature she had never seen? Some one had once shown her an infant, but she had felt too ill to notice the piteous object. She did not even understand that it was her own. There was so much cant and nonsense talked about maternal instinct. A cab drove up to the door; with a cry, her Ladyship rushed to the window. Thank goodness, it was only Sidney. What suffering! What suspense! One more day like this, and she would be on her death-bed.

"Ah! so you have come at last, Sidney?" Where had he been all the morning? She made few demands on his time, but she certainly thought that in common decency and merely for the sake of appearances he would have remained with her to receive poor darling Teresa. It was true that she had not yet arrived, but this did not alter the fact that he *might* have missed her. Poor child! a stranger in her own father's house! But the world was a cruel place, and she, for her part, was sick and tired of it. If it were not for Teresa, who

needed a mother's care, she was by no means sure that she might not seek a speedy way out of it. Suicide, of course, was wicked, but God was never hard on women. He understood them : men did not. . . . Was that the bell ?

"Go and meet her," said Blanche. "Try and look affectionate. I want the poor little thing to think we are glad to see her. As for me, I feel too ill and extraordinary to move."

As she spoke, however, the door was opened, and two nuns, followed by a young girl, were ushered in. Her Ladyship flushed and paled, and, without speaking, with tears raining down her cheeks, took the girl in her arms, tenderly, closely, as only a mother can.

Sir Sidney rubbed his eyes, almost fearing to rest them on a scene so beautiful, so new in his experience. Blanche seemed to him transfigured, and he saw in that brief moment the woman she might have been : all the fair ambitions she had forgotten, all the good impulses she had not obeyed flashed their pure light on her countenance.

Like some guilty creature, he left the room. He was the only sinner there.

CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK.

LORD TWACORBIE.

SIDNEY WICHE, M.P., *Proprietor and Editor of "The Watchman."*

NICHOLAS T. VAN HUYSSTER, *an American millionaire and poet.*

CAPTAIN SAVILLE ROOKES.

SIR VENTRY COXE, *a widower.*

LADY TWACORBIE, *his sister.*

THE HON. FELICIA GORM, *her step-daughter.*

TERESA WARCOP, *an heiress, cousin to Lady Twacorbie.*

LADY MALLINGER, *a very young widow.*

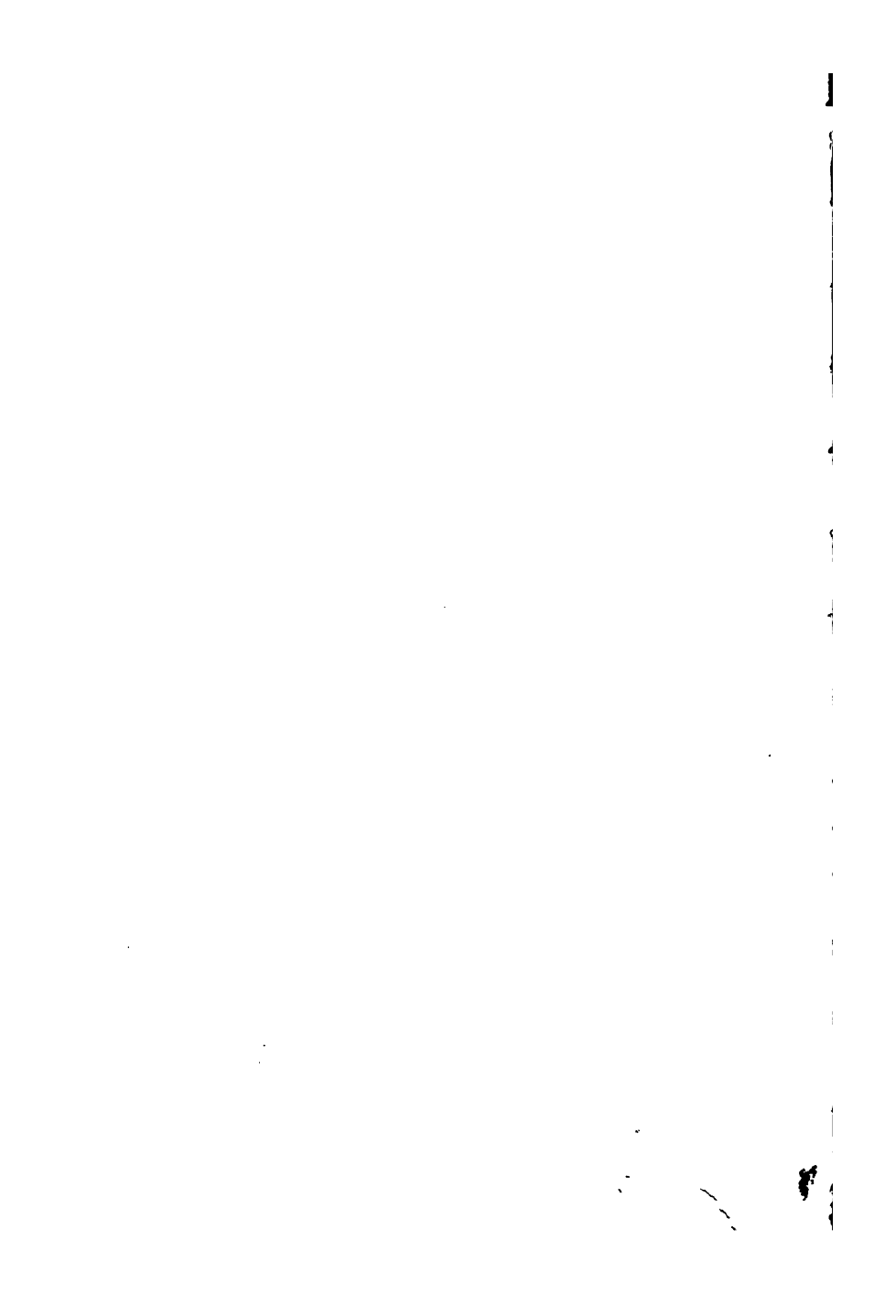
LUFFY, *the head-gardener.*

SPALDING, *the butler.*

MRS. DANBY, *the housekeeper.*

The scene is laid at Arden Lodge, the country seat of Lord Twacorbie, in Mertfordshire. The action takes place in the course of twenty-four hours.

"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."



I.

THE dining-room in Arden Lodge was superbly furnished with a silver chandelier. This splendid object was of such incomparable interest that Lord Twacorbie, who was a man of taste no less than an economist, had the walls which formed its background, bare, the floor beneath covered with a plain drugget, and the tables and chairs in the apartment of the simplest design. On the same artistic principle, he gave large dinners, at which the rarest, indeed, unheard-of delicacies, (which were as disagreeable to the palate as they were interesting to the explorer and antiquarian), formed the brief but sufficient menu.

On a certain evening in the early spring of 189-, one of these dinners had taken place with unusual success, possibly because most of the thirty guests were persons of importance, probably because some roast mutton had, by a new cook's judicious mistake, formed a vulgar but stimulating addition to the choice viands of the banquet. The ladies had left the table, and the fifteen men who remained sighed, some with relief, some with regret, some from the force of example, and some because they could dine no more that day.

Lord Twacorbie was a gentleman whom food did not nourish, and whose airy shapelessness made him seem in some way symbolic of the universe when it was without form, and void. To-night he fluttered

a smile like the sun's on a March morning, and surveyed the company with the feverish gaiety of one who is too seriously bored to risk showing languor. He was of all men the last to entertain a table, yet few attempted the task so often, and no one could have been more ignorant of his failures. He started a conversation on the Early Marriages Bill, and quoted, with inspired inaccuracy, a speech recently made on that subject by his friend, Sidney Wiche. Wiche, who happened to be present, endured his host's recital with the air of one accustomed to suffering; at its close his countenance had something humorous, pathetic, and sublime—St. Lawrence on the gridiron saying, "Turn me! This side is done!" must have looked just so. The editor of *The Watchman* was a man of slender frame and with fewer inches than the ordinary; a small mortal whose boundless spirit—imprisoned yet not impatient for release—gazed through his eyes. His pale face, dull brown hair and duller beard, and the absence in his manner of all that marks the creature of many fashions and one epoch, had made him more famous for his insignificance than any of his contemporaries for their distinction. He was about seven-and-thirty, and hard work had made him look much older.

Two men who sat at the far end of the table seized the advantage of their position, and, talking in undertones, studied him with lively interest.

"Of course, he is clever," said the elder of the two; "or, at least, he is a great man for the mob. There is a distinction between greatness and being great in the eyes of a *certain class*." The speaker,

Sir Ventry Coxe, had the so-called aristocratic air sometimes found in men of middle-class extraction, but unknown amongst the old nobility. Very young girls, sentimental women, and men of his own stamp, thought him extremely handsome: his features were bold and well-defined, his dark eyes could express any drawing-room emotion with really excellent effect; his thin, straight lips suggested his refined tastes to those who understand culture as leanness and vulgarity as curves.

"What do they think of Wiche in America?" continued the Baronet.

"They wonder that he does not marry," replied his companion; "there are so many pretty women in England."

Mr. Nicholas T. Van Huyster was a young man about eight-and-twenty, tall, slight, dark, and clean-shaven. His face was not at first sight sympathetic, but, on the other hand, he did not have the aggressive air of one who is conscious that he must be known to be appreciated.

"Wiche is not popular in society," said Sir Ventry. "He has no presence, no manners, no small talk."

"No," answered the American, "he is not that modern of each May so beloved of dining London."

"His family is nothing," said Sir Ventry. "His mother was a person of no education, who lived with an art-critic called Wiche. By-the-by, can you imagine a more miserable occupation than this scribbling about art? What is Art? Madness in most cases, and mere frippery in others. And only one man here and there makes it pay. Look at Nature, I say, if you want beautiful pictures. But

I was telling you about this fellow. It seems he was christened Sidney Wiche; his mother said that his name was at least Christian if it was not legal! I am thankful to say I never met her. I do not pretend to be a saint, but a woman without a conscience strikes me dumb! I feel that there is nothing more to say!"

"Conscience is the name which the orthodox give to their prejudices," said Van Huyster. "But have you ever heard," he went on, drawing out his pocket-book, "that Wiche's father left a very eccentric will? I received this from New York last night." He handed a newspaper cutting to Sir Ventry, who read the following:—

"Sidney Wiche was to be first a Christian, then a scholar, and in course of time a philosophical politician. He was not to marry, 'but,' ran the strange document, 'should he feel drawn towards the married state let him give the matter his best consideration for a no less term than five years, since marriage is of all subjects the one most darkened by fallacy, falsehood, and false sentiment.' During this period of prayer and reflection he was to read 'neither poets nor romancers, but St. Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman, and the great historians, who, between them, would so satisfy his soul, his manliness, and his common-sense that after their company any feminine prattler would seem a plague rather than a treasure.' He was to shun 'as he would the devil, learned ladies, ladies with artistic gifts, ladies who talked religion, and ladies who were not ladies!' In conclusion, he was earnestly exhorted to practise the pious exercise of meditating for two hours daily on his own nothingness!"

"Very interesting," remarked Sir Ventry; "but interesting things are never true."

"And the truth is only convincing when it is told by an experienced liar," observed Nicholas.

"Old Wiche has been dead for some time," said Sir Ventry, "and I never heard that he left Sidney either means of support or instructions; it ought to be made known if he did. One likes to hear that a man has behaved like a gentleman in such matters. Unfortunately, he died abroad, and his affairs were managed by these Italian scoundrels. One can get nothing out of them. I must say I like English straightforwardness."

"*The Watchman* must bring in a large income," said Van Huyster.

"Undoubtedly," replied Sir Ventry. "But what a rag the paper is! These Radicals are ruining the nation."

"I thought Wiche was a member of your own party."

"My own party," said Sir Ventry, "is not necessarily my own politics! As a man," he went on, after a pause, "I like the fellow well enough, and now that he has pushed his way into the world we all try to forget his origin. But with every desire to be fair, I cannot bring myself to regard him as a suitable match for any relative of my own. It is only too well-known that he admires my sister's step-daughter, Miss Gorm."

"That does not surprise me," said Van Huyster, fetching a deep sigh, "she is lovely. Her face is so bright yet so delicate—a star wrapped in gauze!"

Sir Ventry dropped his lower jaw, but recovered it

on remembering that the millionaire wrote poetry, very bad poetry, too. "Felicia is certainly good-looking," he said; "perhaps you are aware that her mother, the former Lady Twacorbie, was an American. She made Twacorbie an excellent wife, however, greatly improved the estate and was very much liked by the Royalties. She died young."

"Good wives so often do," murmured Van Huyster, "perhaps that is one of their brightest virtues."

Sir Ventry abhorred anything in the nature of satire—it seemed to him a convenient name for offensive and unmistakable allusions to his own character and career. On this occasion he wondered whether Van Huyster was aware that he, too, Sir Ventry Coxe, had in his day buried some sixty-three inches of weary perfection. He decided to ignore the remark.

"One can see," he said, "that Felicia is extremely un-English: her manners are a little crude. But I like a woman who can talk: a man wants to be amused, he does not want to wear his brains out amusing a wife!"

At this point Lord Twacorbie rose up from the table.

The pantry was immediately behind the dining-room—and here, at the close of the dinner, Spalding, the butler, the head-gardener, Luffy, and Mrs. Danby, the housekeeper, were engaged in conversation of an even more instructive nature than that indulged by Lord Twacorbie and his distinguished company.

"Who came down from town this evening?" asked Luffy.

"Sir Ventry, Mr. Wiche, Captain Rookes, and this new American, Mr. Van Huyster," said the housekeeper.

"And who are the women?" continued Luffy.

"Miss Warcop for one," said Mrs. Danby. "Between ourselves her ladyship is on the matchmaking hop again. But there—when did she ever pull anything off what you may call satisfactory? She's too hopeful. And say what you like, Luffy, it doesn't do to be hopeful in this world. Expect nothing, I say!" The widow shook her head, and heaved her breast, and hurled a poignant glance at Spalding, who had been shuddering on the brink of matrimony for twelve and a half years.

"It might be a very good thing for Sir Ventry if Miss Warcop would have him," said Spalding; "but the question arises in my mind, will she? If she would take my advice she would stay single!"

"Everybody is not so wrapt up in themselves as you are," said Mrs. Danby, tartly.

"If I was a woman," murmured Spalding, in a weak voice, "the man doesn't live that I would sacrifice my peace of mind for. Men are not worth so much thought. The devotion of women is something awful to think of."

"It is," sighed Luffy, whose wife had a jealous temperament, "it is."

"I can say this much," said Mrs. Danby: "when Miss Warcop marries she will not choose a conceited, self-seeking, cold-hearted, unfeeling *half-a-man* like Sir Ventry! I would not look at him—no, not if he draped me in diamonds from head to foot! Mr. Wiche is the man for her."

"Not he," said Spalding, "he's got his eye on Lady Mallinger."

"If he was to roll his eyes at Lady Mallinger from now till Doomsday," said Mrs. Danby, "I should still say that he and Miss Warcop were made for each other. And, what is more, they will marry. Whoever lives longest will see the most. I know what I know. If God Almighty intends a couple to marry that marriage will come off. The man can't help himself. Just you bear that in mind!"

She left them, and neither of the men had the courage to smile. They talked instead of the new Cemetery, and grew cheerful on the subject of coffins.

II.

ARDEN LODGE in Mertfordshire is a large, white building surrounded by beautiful grounds, and facing the finest scenery in the county. This is saying a great deal, for although Mertford is flat and not at all wild or what is called romantic, its rivers and fields, gardens and woods, toy-like farms and shady parks are, for their kind, the prettiest in the world. And one can only find such peculiar prettiness in England; it is so well-disposed, calm and unsuggestive—inspiring neither passionate sentiments, nor unearthly music, nor flaming words, but what, in some opinions, may be better than all these—a dreamless, ineffable drowsiness.

On the morning after the dinner-party, a lady and gentleman were strolling on the Terrace which led by wide steps on to the lawn of Lord Twacorbie's residence. The lady was Miss Warcop: her escort was Sidney Wiche.

Teresa was no longer in her first youth, and she had never been pretty: her oval face was colourless, heavy black eyebrows overhung her hazel eyes; mouth, nose, and chin were too obviously mouth, nose, and chin. She was remarkable, however, and only needed a reputation for wickedness to make her considered curiously fascinating.

As these two came down the steps, they were commenting on the weather, the unusual warmth

seeing it was but Easter, and the freshness of the air. When they reached the lawn, they walked in silence to a seat, sat down and stared at the landscape. They were evidently old friends.

"Well," said Wiche, at last, "is the most practical woman in the world, dreaming?"

"I was thinking of you," she answered, looking at him with such frank, unclouded affection that he blushed to think how little he deserved it. He might have made some answer, but as she spoke they both heard the rustle of silk skirts: the sound grew nearer: at last a lady, charmingly attired in a gown which suggested grey vapour and sunlight, approached them. She presented a strange effect of brilliance, fragility, and mistiness: her features were soft, and her head in profile seemed rather a shadow in the air than something real or human. But the shadow was plainly womanish—one could never have mistaken it for an angel's. Her skin was fair, her hair light brown, her eyes blue, sapphirine, deep, a little troubled: she gazed at Wiche, he gazed at her; Teresa watched the meeting with some uneasiness.

"I did not know that the glare was so great," she said, faintly; "I should have brought my parasol."

"Let me fetch it!" said Wiche.

She thanked him as, with an admirable semblance of good humour, he left them.

"You met Mr. Wiche some years ago, did you not?" Teresa asked, turning to Lady Mallinger: "did you know him at all well?"

"That would depend on what you call *well*," said the younger woman. Her voice was strangely melodious: to hear it was to think of the fabulous

singing of fabulous sirens. If she babbled of brick-dust, one thought only of lute-strings. For this reason she was never quoted accurately.

"I mean," said Teresa, "were you great friends?"

"I should not say that."

"I thought I saw him looking at you rather often during dinner last evening."

"Did he?" said Lady Mallinger. "I hope my hair was dressed properly. My maid is in love just at present, and she makes me quite frightful. It is not that she is malicious, but Love is so distracting." Smiling sweetly, she looked first at the trees, then at the grass, and finally at Teresa. "In some ways," she went on, "I am rather sorry to renew Mr. Wiche's acquaintance: we have nothing in common—absolutely nothing. He has the instincts of a Turk: he does not believe in a woman's intellect. Sometimes I wish I really was stupid and lived in a harem!"

"My dear!" said Teresa.

"I do, indeed: women were not made to struggle and strive. They ought only to be fed and clothed and petted. But I thought otherwise once. Before my marriage I was anxious to work out a career: I wanted to be artistic: I thought I might become a famous actress. Ah, to think of those days when I was hoping and dreaming, when my thoughts were my achievements, when the future seemed so far and the present so eternal!" Her voice trembled, she flushed and then grew pale: one could imagine that she was struggling in a very hurricane of lost possibilities. "But when work began in earnest," she continued, "when art became a task, and dreaming, waste of time, I confess I grew sick of ambition. I only

wanted to sit idle in the market-place. And so I married, and danced, and dressed, and chattered : I gave up thinking—it made me too miserable.” Teresa had an extraordinary power of winning confidences : perhaps because she rarely talked.

“A woman’s mission is to play the fool,” continued Lady Mallinger, “and that is why she can only lead a man so long as she does not love him. On the instant she loves, she must be honest or die : she loses all discretion : she quarrels when she should cajole, smiles when she should frown, utters ugly truth when she should tell pretty lies : she cannot flatter, she cannot pretend—in fact, she can do nothing but love—and that beyond sense.” Commanding was not the word for Lady Mallinger’s manner : yet there was that in her air which insisted, which brooked no denial, which said plainly enough : “What I think must be, because I was not born to be disappointed !”

“I do not agree with you,” said Teresa, “because if I loved a man I would have no desire to lead him. I could only pray that I might not prove his stumbling-block, and that we might help each other to do right rightly. Life is so hard to live alone.”

“Oh, if I only dared to be natural,” exclaimed Lady Mallinger ; “if I only dared to tell all I think, and feel, and know. If I could only drop this tedious gossiping and grinning ! I am not tired of living, but I am tired of my body—of this mummy-case. When I was a child, I felt old ; now I am a woman, I feel young. I want to go back to the youth or the world : I want the time when love was the only happiness, and folly the highest wisdom !”

"Did you ever talk like this to Mr. Wiche?" said Teresa.

"Of course not," said Lady Mallinger. "I only talk nonsense to men!"

"Dear me! Yet I daresay they like it. But I promised to show Mr. Wiche the primrose path. As you do not care for him, I will meet him half-way. See! he is coming now." She rose from her seat and hastened across the lawn in the direction of the house. Lady Mallinger sat smiling to herself: she had never suffered from jealousy, and she thought it the drollest of passions. She was on the verge of laughter when Captain Rookes appeared on the Terrace. He was undeniably handsome: his features had that harmonious irregularity which is so much more like truth than beauty, so much more life-like, sinner-like, and love-like than perfection. His eyes flashed fire and sentiment—youth lacking either is dull—melancholy had added a force to their magic.

"Are you sure," he said, anxiously, as he approached Lady Mallinger, "are you sure that it is discreet to meet here where every one can see us?"

"Of course," said her ladyship, whose whole bearing and manner changed, and who now assumed an infantile, prattling, and pouting simplicity; "of course, I hate out-of-the-way corners."

"Speak a little lower, darling," said Saville, "there may be some gardeners about."

"That would not matter."

"Not matter? My dear Lilian, you do not know the world. If the world knew how much we loved each other, it would grow suspicious."

"Why? Numbers of people love each other."

"Yes," said the Captain, "but we are not like other people. I love you too well to ask you to marry me and so drag you down to a miserable shabby-genteel existence."

"I do not mind being poor, Saville," said Lady Mallinger, eagerly. "Before my marriage, Papa only allowed me sixty pounds a year for my clothes, and every one said how well I managed. That, I know, was as a girl, and, of course, a married woman has to dress more—in a sense—but a handsome mantle goes a long way. Lady Twacorbie has worn that satin and lace thing at least four seasons: she has had the sleeves altered, and it has been re-lined with a different colour, but it is the same cloak! And I am tired of marrying for money: it is not as though I had not tried it. No one can say that I gave the least trouble when they married me to Charles—although I never did admire red hair, and he was the worst dancer in his regiment. I know he was most civil to poor Papa, but after all he was not so rich as they thought him, and it would have been wiser, perhaps, if I had remained single a little longer. But *you*, Saville, I could be poor with you: you are so sympathetic, and you wrote me such a beautiful letter when Charles died. I am sure, too, that he would have been pleased with that lovely wreath! And—and I cannot forget the old days when we made toffee together in the schoolroom at home. Do you remember?"

Saville tried to look as though the toffee episode had for him thoughts too deep for utterance. He flung cautious glances about the scene and then hastily pressed her hand.

"How can you ask?" he said: "But believe me, dearest Lilian, our only duty is renunciation. I mean, we must forget our love, and if we can, each other. I have been waiting months to find words for all this: it seemed unutterable. Truth is difficult, and the less one speaks it the harder it grows. I have lied when I pretended to be happy. I find it easier after all to admit that I am in despair. Yet not despair—because I feel that honour is still dearer to me than your society. The thought is hackneyed, but so are the commandments. Some day you will meet some excellent, well-meaning man who will have a fortune worth offering you. Perhaps he will not be much to look at and he may not be polished in his manners. I daresay, too, that he will often say and do much which will jar on your refined taste. But polish is not everything!"

"I cannot live," cried Lady Mallinger, "in an unpolished atmosphere!"

"You see, my darling, we all have to endure disagreeable things in this life; money and love never seem to go together."

"We should have fifteen hundred a year," whimpered Lilian.

"What is that, my dear child?" said Saville. "Two thousand is the lowest income I can conceive myself marrying on. As I have said, if I cared for you in the ordinary, vulgar way, I might risk everything and urge you to ruin my whole life—and perhaps your own as well. So, darling, is it fair to tempt me?"

"I do not want to tempt you," said Lady Mallinger. "I only want to talk sensibly. Please, please, dear

Saville, do not say that I am tempting you. I would not be so wicked, for I am sure you only want to do right, and men know much more about honour and incomes and things like that than women do ! ”

Sweet, submissive, believing, unassertive Lilian, of a type all but extinct ! Where would he find such another ? He rose from his seat in agitation, feeling, for the moment, that he might in an emergency show the splendid indiscretion of a hero. But the mood passed, and with it a great deal of Lady Mallinger's folly. Something else, indefinable, chilling, deadly, took its place in her soul. She, too, stood up, and in silence they surveyed a far-distant and sleeping cow.

“ You see, Lilian,” Saville stammered at last.

“ I see it all clearly,” she replied. “ I only wonder why I did not see it before. It would be the greatest mistake in the world for us to marry ! ”

This remark cut him to the heart : he flushed, his whole aspect suffered.

“ No woman,” he said, “ could say such a thing to a man she loved. You cannot care for me.”

“ I do indeed care for you, Saville,” she said, “ please believe me.”

Rookes, happily, did not need much persuasion to convince him. “ This world is a beastly place,” he burst forth. “ It has everything to make one happy except happiness. Look at us ! We are young, we love each other, we have the same tastes, and we are in the same set. How we could enjoy life ! But we cannot afford it.”

“ It is hard,” said Lilian, “ terribly hard. I daresay, though, that it is all for the best.”

"I must go away," said Saville : "I see too much of you ; it is too tantalizing ! But hush ! here comes Felicia."

"How well you know her step !" exclaimed Lilian.

III.

FELICIA GORM was a young girl about seventeen, with large blue eyes, small regular features, and rosy cheeks ; to-day she was even rosier than usual.

"Mama would be so grateful if you would talk to Mr. Van Huyster," she said to Saville ; "he is asking so many questions about England, and no one can answer him."

When Rookes had left them, Felicia tried to look disinterested. "Have you ever noticed," she said, "how easily he blushes. . . . It does not mean anything—although Mama says that men only blush nowadays to be mistaken for Christians ! I am sure that is not the case with Captain Rookes. . . . Do you like him ? "

"We are half-cousins ! "

The young girl sat down by her side. "Dear Lady Mallinger," she said, "I am dreadfully unhappy. But I am so fond of you ; I am sure you will help me."

"Indeed, I will. What is troubling you ? "

"Where shall I begin ? Mama sent for me this morning. I felt it was to be a serious conversation because she wore her coronet brooch. She told me that if Mr. Wiche asked me to marry him, I was to say yes. Think of it ! It seems they have arranged it all between them ; they think he is growing too democratic, and now he has refused a Baronetcy he has

become more popular than ever. They say it would be such an excellent thing if he married a Peer's daughter, and Mama says I must sacrifice myself for the sake of the country. I am sure that marriage into *our* family will not change his opinion of the House of Lords! I have no influence with him, but Mama says I must try to have one; that he must be very fond of me or he would not stay here. Every one knows that he detests visiting as a rule. I believe he is in love with *you*, but Mama says that is an absurd idea, because he knew you before you married Lord Mallinger, and he is not the kind of man who would fancy your style of beauty in a wife. He is always staring at you, at any rate. Then I said he seemed great friends with Teresa; but then, as Mama says, dear Teresa is almost ugly, and if he had intended to marry her for her money, he would have done so long ago! So I suppose I must be the one after all, and in the end I shall have to accept him. But—but I shall always love Saville best!"

"Saville?" exclaimed Lady Mallinger, in astonishment. "Saville?"

"If you knew him as I do, you would not wonder that I love him," said Felicia, blushing deeply, "he is so chivalrous, so noble, so unselfish, just like King Arthur in Lord Tennyson. And to hear him speak of women! He thinks we are all angels. I am so afraid, dear Lady Mallinger, lest he may be disappointed in us, because we are not all angels, are we?"

Lady Mallinger all this time had kept her eyes on the ground, and, but for her gentle breathing, betrayed no signs of animation. At the girl's question, however, she stirred.

"Has Saville told you—has he said—has he spoken——?"

"He knows that I love him," said Felicia, faintly.

"But has he asked you to be his wife?"

"Not in so many words, but words are not everything. He is not rich; he is afraid people might say—you know what they always say. Once he told me he wished I had no money—that I was poor and unknown. Oh, I understand him so well."

"I am sure your family would not care for the match," said Lilian, at last; "and evidently they have set their hearts on Wiche. Wiche is rather odd, but I was only thinking last night what a fine face he has: he would make you a kind husband, and you would be quite contented—after a little." The foolishness of mortals may often be startled into a certain sagacity; and Felicia's innocence had the effect of rousing Lady Mallinger's common-sense which, though undisciplined and kitten-like, was still promising.

"No doubt," she continued, looking gravely at the girl's anxious face, "Saville is most agreeable, and it is very pleasing to think that such a handsome, popular fellow is in love with one. But would you feel so flattered if he were plain: if you heard, for instance, that he was fickle, mercenary, and treacherous!"

"But I might hear that of Wiche, too," said Felicia. "You see, dear Lady Mallinger, I must believe in *some* man or I could not marry at all! And I would rather be deceived by Saville than adored by Sidney Wiche!"

"That is absurd. I should be very wrong to encourage you in such ideas. When you are older you will see how foolish it is to indulge in these fancies!"

"I am afraid you do not like Saville," said Felicia, suddenly.

"My dear little girl," said Lilian, with great dignity, "it is only because I am Saville's friend that I understand your point of view!"

"Then why are you so angry with me for loving him? I am sure you would not care for any one who was not noble and generous—you would not be his friend if he did not have fine qualities!"

Conversation between a disillusioned devotee and an enthusiastic novice is always difficult: the disillusioned fears to be candid, and the enthusiast fears nothing; one has not learnt enough, the other has all to learn. This, then, was the situation of Lady Mallinger and Felicia. To one, Saville seemed a traitor; to the other, he was a being with neither body, soul, nor passions—a portable ideal who, at his sublimest, murmured, "I love you!" Rookes was, as a matter of fact, a mortal whose good intentions and generous admiration for the admirable were not steady enough to carry the load of a fashionable education, nor robust enough to endure the nipping cruelty of society small talk. He feared his better instincts as the pious do their besetting sins, and when he was surprised into one of his natural virtues, his first precaution was to make it appear a polite vice.

"I will not say one word against Saville," said Lady Mallinger, at last. "I would rather not discuss him. In any case I can only implore you to obey your relatives: after all they must know best."

"Then," said Felicia, "it would be useless to ask you to help me."

"What can I do?" asked Lady Mallinger; "what is there that I could do?"

"Well," said Felicia, "you see I am not yet engaged to Mr. Wiche. If he could only be made *not* to propose, everything would come right. Dear Lady Mallinger, if you would only distract his attention : you are so much prettier than I am, and I am sure he would be far more influenced by you than he ever could be by me. Oh, please promise me that you will try."

This suggestion was not without its charm. Lilian had a certain liking for Wiche : he appealed to her head rather than to her imagination, to her sympathies rather than to her senses : and, though he did not inspire her with poetic thoughts, he made the prose of her existence seem less like prose.

"Perhaps there would be no harm," she said, "and yet——"

"Oh, do promise," said Felicia, "my life and soul are bound up in it."

"One can tie a great many knots in one's life and soul," said Lady Mallinger.

"But love is so mysterious—so wonderful. It is the music of the world."

"It is a pity that it goes so often out of tune!" said Lilian. "Oh," she added suddenly, "our life is on so small a scale : everything seems so petty. Are women only born to fall in love with men like Saville Rookes ? Why do we do these things ?"

"Because there is nothing else for us to do, I suppose," said Felicia.

"But think of all these clever women who paint pictures, and make speeches, and write for the papers, and sing, and act, and play. Ah, how grand it must be to have something serious to think of!"

"I believe they get very tired of it," said Felicia.
"I am sure they are not half so happy as we are."

"Are we happy?" said Lilian.

"Of course we are," replied the young girl.
"What a strange question!"

"Perhaps it is strange. I feel tired."

"And you look pale," said Felicia. "Let me fetch you my scent-bottle." She ran lightly across the lawn and up the Terrace steps without perceiving Saville, who was returning from another direction.

He came close to Lady Mallinger and looked into her face.

"You do not look well," he said.

"I am well enough."

"Did that poor little thing bore you?"

"Not at all."

"Why are you so curt?"

"Am I?"

"Have I offended you?"

"Oh, no," said Lady Mallinger. "But you know quite well what Felicia has been talking about. You have acted abominably."

"What have I done?" asked Rookes. "Is it a crime to pay a few silly compliments to a child. She is hardly more. You are surely not jealous? You know you are the only woman I really care for. A man may love various women for various reasons at all times of his life, but he can only love once, one way. Each experience is totally different, and absolutely new; only one, however, can be quite satisfactory. Now to love you is my second nature; it is part of my constitution. If you do not trust me, why did you encourage me?"

"Why?" said Lady Mallinger, with flashing eyes. "Why? do you ask me why? I will not lie to you. I loved you because I thought you loved me—because I felt that you would help me, *you*, who were so much stronger, so much nobler, so much braver than I. When you said . . . when you seemed to think I had some beauty, I longed to be the most beautiful of all women, that you might be proud of me: I longed to be royal that I might throw aside my royalty and show the world that I would rather be ruled by you than rule a kingdom: I wanted a palace that I might leave it and follow you into darkness and poverty: I wished that we lived in times of danger that I might save you from death, that I might lie for you, hate for you, steal for you, die for you! How I have loved you! how have you deceived me! I have nothing left but contempt for both of us. . . . Stay there!"

She walked away alone, and as he felt too ashamed to follow in her footsteps, he chose another path, and was therefore late for luncheon. A fact which showed the injured woman that her words had played some havoc with his conscience.

IV.

SIR VENTRY had been trying since noon to exchange a few words of immense importance with his sister. At last, in the drawing-room after luncheon, he found the moment. Teresa was playing the piano : Van Huyster and Felicia were within sight on the lawn. Lady Mallinger was cooing to some love-birds in a gilt cage which hung near the window. Lady Twacorbie sat at a little distance from the others, embroidering an altar-cloth. She was a being about five-and-thirty, dressed with elegance, but with no attempt at individuality. No doubt eleven out of every dozen women in her own station were wearing gowns of the same hue, make, and texture. Her hair was flaxen and arranged in the artificial, half-grotesque style commanded by Court hairdressers : at a first glance she looked like a wax doll—the unchanging expression, the neat, set features, the unseeing eyes, had not the divine impress. Yet she lived and was a woman : without her false curls, her whale-bones, and her stare, she was even beautiful : in unguarded moments, she was witty. She was not accomplished, however, and had no force of will ; the winds of opinion blew her feather-like round the four corners of her boudoir. But in her way she was perfectly happy : she sighed for no new experiences and wept over no old ones : life presented no enigmas, and, feeling neither sorrow nor wonder, she had no need of philosophy. She read

nothing, but was extraordinarily observant, and had a most tenacious memory for little things. For instance, she could quote whole conversations, and describe to a half-turn just how this one entered a room, that one shook hands, and the other sat down : she delighted afternoon callers by remembering how each liked his or her tea—A. never took sugar, B. liked three large lumps or four small ones, C. only drank hot water, D. could not bear the sight of cream, and so on. This was the lighter side of her character : she had a certain amount of sentiment, and would have made a devoted wife and mother of the primitive type. But the creatures of her world were bored by devotion, so she flirted in the most religious manner possible, and had an Infants' Bible Class.

"My dear Charlotte," said Sir Ventry, "has it never occurred to you that Van Huyster is deeply interested in Felicia? I have observed it for days."

"You are always making unnecessary discoveries," replied his sister. "You know my plans with regard to Felicia. Wiche will certainly speak to her either to-day or to-morrow."

Van Huyster is a far more desirable match ; he is not only richer, but more tractable," said Sir Ventry. "If he were to speak first——"

"As you say," murmured her ladyship, "he is enormously rich."

"Precisely : that is my point. And he goes everywhere."

"But then Wiche is such a power in politics," said Lady Twacorbie ; "think what good we could do by our influence over him !"

"The country would be far more grateful," said

Sir Ventry, "if we helped Van Huyster to spend his money in a gentlemanly manner. However, it is your affair not mine. I have made a suggestion : act on it or not, as you please," and he strutted magnificently from her presence.

For some moments Lady Twacorbie did not ply her needle, but unpicked the stitches she had taken during the preceding conversation. At last she called Lilian. "Come and talk to me, my dear," she said ; "I have not had a word with you since breakfast. You see I drove Harold to the station"—(Lord Twacorbie had gone to town for a few days)—"He was so sorry to leave us." She glanced at Van Huyster and Felicia who passed the window. "We are so anxious about Felicia," she said ; "young girls are so flighty—is it reasonable to suppose that they are competent to select the right sort of man ? Ah, if women would only choose their husbands as carefully as they do their bonnets, how much brighter life would be !"

"But, my dear Lady Twacorbie, what would you call the right sort of a husband ?"

"A man," she replied, "with means, position, a good digestion, and sound principles : such a person, for instance, as this excellent, kind-hearted, and deserving Van Huyster !"

"Van Huyster !" said Lady Mallinger, in surprise.

"Yes. Have you observed how extremely attentive he is to Felicia ?"

"Perhaps I have, now you speak of it," said Lilian, "but I thought Mr. Wiche——"

"Ah !" said Lady Twacorbie, "Mr. Wiche is all very well in his proper place. I have the greatest

respect for his undeniable merits. I hope, however—I earnestly hope that he will not do anything rash. In fact, I may as well confess that I am in a difficulty. As Harold was obliged to go to town to-day, and as Ventry is not well, I asked Mr. Wiche if he would escort Felicia and myself to the Bishop's Bazaar this afternoon. I see now that it might cause gossip in the neighbourhood; people make such absurd remarks. Besides, I fear it is scarcely kind to throw the poor man so frequently in the dear child's society. Do you think you could keep him amused in some way until we have left the house: we can pretend that there was some blunder and perhaps take Mr. Van Huyster. . . . These things are difficult to explain."

"I think I understand," said Lady Mallinger: "of course, I will do anything to make myself useful. But I must at least change my gown: I heard him say he liked my blue muslin!" She went out laughing so gaily, that Teresa, who was playing mournful music, left the piano and came down to her cousin.

"What is the joke?" she asked.

Lady Twacorbie did not hesitate over her reply. She had made up her mind that Teresa was dying of love for the elegant Ventry and would therefore have no interest in the matrimonial schemes with regard to Sidney Wiche.

"Ventry has convinced me with regard to Van Huyster and Felicia," she said, at once. "Obstinacy is not one of my faults, and I am never deaf to reason. I have arranged everything in the most charming way: Lilian has agreed to distract Mr. Wiche's attention. Of course, dear, I would have asked you, but you are much too clever! One can only trust

a fool to carry out a plot of this kind with success. She is such a simpleton—just the silly creature to hoodwink a man of genius ! ”

“ Oh, this is too much ! ” said Teresa. “ I assure you a more accomplished actress never lived. She is far cleverer than either of us.”

“ Absurd ! Impossible ! ” said Lady Twacorbie.

“ There is nothing easier than the impossible—for Lady Mallinger. But I am sure that Sidney will see through her nonsense at once ; you must remember that he is my friend and I have known him for years : your plan will not succeed.”

“ But he admires her extremely,” said Lady Twacorbie.

“ Has he ever told you so ? ”

“ Of course not : it is because he has never said so, that I am certain of it. Men are dreadfully discreet, my dear Teresa. I only believe in what they do *not* say. But come, we must leave the coast clear, come ! ”

Teresa followed her slowly.

V.

LADY MALLINGER re-entered the room a few moments later, in all her bravery of blue muslin, ribbons, and lace. She was cooing to the love-birds when Wiche came in. His acquaintance with Lady Mallinger had extended over some four years: from her point of view it might have been called a dinner-party friendship—that is to say, they could discuss people and subjects of the hour with a freedom which passes well enough for intimacy in the vagueness, bustle, and gigantic pettiness of a London season. But to Wiche their occasional meetings and interchange of ideas had meant much more; the man of letters is not a man of letters if he accepts life and the circumstances of life as they appear at first sight—it is the prime instinct of his nature to reject what *seems* and to clutch—or die in failing to clutch—things not as they are, but as his imagination would have them. To be brief, our friend had fallen in love with the idea of loving Lady Mallinger.

“Do I disturb you?” he said, and took a seat near her. She smiled at him and made a charming grimace at her pets.

“There is a bazaar at the Bishop’s this afternoon,” he continued, “and I believe I was expected to go, but as Van Huyster enjoys these things and I do not, I have asked Lady Twacorbie to take him in my

stead. I hope she will not be offended, but I really wanted to get a quiet hour with you.

Her heart jumped and she studied him with a new interest. There is one glory of the friend, and another glory of the possible lover. For the first time she discovered that he had a certain intensity, a masterful air, a look of determination—all of which she admired.

"We have so few opportunities to speak to each other," he said.

"You have changed since I first knew you," cried Lady Mallinger: "we were such good friends once, and now—when we meet—I hardly know how to describe it—there is a coldness, a restraint. I have feared that you did not like me. But I am saying too much."

"If I told you that there was indeed a reason for my restraint, would you care?"

She put her lips to the cage and piped, apparently to the birds—"Tell me the reason!"

"Have you never guessed it? was I so hard to understand?"

"I could never understand any man, but then a man never seems able to explain himself, does he?"

"It may be that he dare not try," said Wiche.

"What could he fear?" she asked; "can it be that men know how unstable they are? I always thought they could not, because they never try to be firmer. And I love firmness! Now we women know only too well that we are very weak, very foolish, very shallow, and we wonder what men can see in us! We must be so tiresome! such burdens! such unnecessary evils! such tedious, provoking creatures! Some of us may have some beauty; yet that

soon goes, and then there is nothing left of us but a headache ! Oh, do not look surprised : I fear I am growing cynical. I am beginning to agree with many of your views on the soul, and death, and marriage, and things of that order ! ”

“ Ah ! never trust a man’s opinion on any subject until he has been in love,” said Wiche. “ Love is the only thing which can make life as clear as noon-day.”

“ Then I suppose you still find it dark and perplexing ! Dear me ! how idly I talk. I meant to say—but would it be impertinent ? I was only thinking that a day, an hour, perhaps a few words might make all the difference in your ideas ! ”

“ If I told you,” said Wiche, “ that sleeping and waking I heard but one voice, saw but one face.”

“ Does it bore you ? ” she said, “ would you rather *not* see it ? ”

“ Each day,” he continued, “ it grows dearer to me, more beautiful, more—ah ! if I waited until I were more eloquent I would never speak, never tell you my one hope, my one aim, my one ambition—above all things, beyond all things, before all things. Just—to gain you ; to gain you—just that. I would not own it was impossible, I only saw you, loved you and waited. You passed me by, you hardly knew me. I was only one in a crowded world. A friend ? Yes, when you remembered me ? was that often ? Sometimes we talked together : once I wrapped you in your opera cloak, have you forgotten ? I touched your cheek—it was an accident.”

“ As you say,” murmured Lilian, “ it only happened once.”

“ Another time you leant for a moment on my arm.”

"That was a year ago ! "

"In March," he said, "it was a perfect night."

"Oh, no ! it rained."

"A perfect night," he repeated, moving nearer, "and you never guessed how much I loved you : how much you were to me ; how much I loved you ! How beautiful, how very beautiful——" He kissed her.

Lady Mallinger started away in a sudden panic. "I did not mean to say so much," she said. "I did not mean—but hark !" She put her finger to her lips and flew across the room into a large chair with wide arms. These concealed her from Teresa Warcop who now entered. She was evidently much agitated in spite of her quiet manner. "I am so glad to find you alone," she said to Wiche, "because I must speak to you. But first let me say, in justice to myself, that I am not a mischief-maker. If I ever seem meddlesome it is only because I am so interested in my friends that I cannot remain silent when speech would be of service to them."

"You have too much heart," said Wiche.

"I cannot bear to see a man deceived, trifled with, made a jest for chattering vixens !" said Teresa, passionately.

"The worst of it is that he rarely shows gratitude if one endeavours to enlighten him."

"A thankless task, I know," said Teresa ; "but if we only do our duty for the sake of being thanked, we are miserable creatures. . . . O Sidney ! never trust a woman ! At least, never trust blue eyes ! Oh ! when I think of it, I lose all patience, almost all charity. That such a man should be duped by such a woman !

Woman, did I say? No, a mere bundle of fire and frivolity!"

"How much more promising than mere flesh-and-blood," exclaimed Wiche.

"She made a bargain," said Teresa, "a kind of wager—that she would force you into a flirtation. And she thinks she is succeeding: she even began her machinations at luncheon. I saw it all: her looks, laughs, sighs. Oh, it was insupportable!"

"Are you speaking of poor little Felicia?" said Wiche.

"Felicia?" said Teresa. "Felicia? When I speak of a creature with neither heart, morals, mind, nor beauty—a heap of lies, vanity, and affectation—I mean Lady Mallinger."

Wiche grew so pale that Teresa—half with jealousy and half with fright—grew even paler. She held out both her trembling hands, and stumbled blindly towards him.

"My heart has been with you," she stammered. "I feel it all, see it all, know it all."

What she meant she hardly knew. He neither looked nor uttered a reply; but, brushing past her with a gesture hard to translate, walked to the window. A stillness almost like some grim and living presence filled the room. Teresa remained in her rigid attitude, staring, with despairing tenderness, not at the man, but at the place where he had stood.

"A wager! a bargain!" said Wiche, at last. "I do not understand."

"Nor did I when I first heard it," said Teresa. "I could scarcely believe anything so odious, even of her. And I have heard a good many stories, too!"

But Charlotte explained the matter only too clearly. *Lilian was to distract you.* That was the expression : her own words." She paused a moment. Wiche never stirred, but kept one unchanging expression, which betrayed nothing save its unchangeableness. "Have I been wrong to tell you?" she went on ; "have I been wrong ? But friendship, my sense of justice, and you—the noblest man I know, the one above all others I—I respect."

"I do not understand you—or her," said Wiche, at last.

"My dear friend, men only understand the kind of woman who is more masculine than a man ! . . . But, Sidney, are you vexed with me ? Have I been too zealous ? You know, you surely believe I meant no malice ? Yet I cannot say that I feel any kindness for Lady Mallinger ; that would be impossible. I despise her ! "

"Is that necessary ? " said Wiche.

"Can I forgive her conduct towards yourself ? Not that she has succeeded in fooling you. But the attempt—I cannot forgive the attempt. What impudence ! what presumption ! "

"Ah, there you are unjust ! The feat was well within her power : I was only too willing to be fooled."

"Willing !" cried Teresa. "Where is your spirit ? How weak a man is, after all ! What a mercy that she cannot hear you : it would make her even vainer than she is by nature."

"I fear we are growing too old and prosaic," said Wiche, bitterly ; "no wonder these young people try to rouse us."

"Sidney ! . . . Do I seem old ? "

"No one would guess your age," he said, without looking at her

"Unfortunately, you know it !" said Teresa.
"Would you have forgiven *me*, if I had made such a bargain as this other woman ? I think not."

Wiche did not hear the remark, or if he did, he made no reply.

She swallowed a sob and left the room

er. And

VI.

LADY MALLINGER came forward half-crying, half-defiant.

"I cannot, I will not believe one word Teresa has said!" exclaimed Wiche. "She is the most honest soul in the world, but she makes mistakes."

"You would be wiser," said Lilian, slowly, "if you believed her."

"So you admit it," he said. "Do you think that Love is a plaything? a mood for a dull afternoon? a frame of mind to jump in and out of just for amusement? Is it nothing to stake your life on another's, to be faithful when they are faithless, strong when they are weak? Is it so little to love like this? Do you think it is so easy? Do you think it brings much happiness?"

Until that hour, the devotion he had felt for Lady Mallinger was of that unreal kind which is only dangerous so long as its object remains an idea. It was to a great extent theoretic, and based on the dogmas of erotic poetry: in her image he loved a dozen heroines—not one woman. Now that he had kissed her, however, and she had shown herself sufficiently human to rouse his anger, the whole relation changed. He no longer saw her through the mist of sentimental fancy; she was simply a pretty woman who attracted him. He felt vaguely that she might tempt him to say and do much

which he would surely repent of. He repeated again, "Do you think such love brings much happiness?"

"Ah! if you only knew me as I know myself," murmured Lady Mallinger. "All that Teresa said of me was true—and yet, not true enough. Everything about me was falsehood and pretence, until—until you seemed to believe in me. Do you understand? Can you not see? Are you so unforgiving, or—are you only blind? Why are you so silent?"

She held out her hand, which he took half-eagerly and half in dread: her lightest touch seemed so much more satisfying than all the wisdom of the ancients.

"If I could only remain silent," said Wiche, passionately; "if I could only keep you—only feel that you were mine—mine—mine at all risks! Yet no—you act too well. I could never know how much I was mistaken."

"Why should we refuse the happiness this hour gives us, because some other hour might take it away? In the meantime, there can be no better thing than this. No one before has ever cared whether I was in jest or earnest," she faltered; "every other man takes it for granted that I am heartless, brainless, and soulless in any case. When I am serious, they say I am in low spirits; when I am sincere, they praise my hypocrisy. So I take refuge in deceit, and I succeed so well that now I have deceived myself, and I no longer know what I mean, what I want, what I think, or what I am! To judge me fairly, you should have lived my life. My father was not kind; at eighteen I married. The world liked my husband: he ate too much, drank too much, and made too

merry with other people's lives. No one knows what I have suffered. I have only found one thing which outweighs disappointment—bitterness—all—all that is harsh, heavy to bear, and terrible. That moment—that one moment when you trusted me. . . . It was so unexpected. I had always liked you as a friend; but you seemed so far away, and I thought you could only have contempt for me and my vain, hopeless life. And the end of it all? Do you suppose I never think of that? Every night I say to myself, 'Another day has gone; another day of false hopes, false friends, false loves, false hates, false griefs!' Think of it! Not even a real grief: my life, myself, all—all a sham!"

"Help me to be as honest as you are," said Wiche: "is there no eternity before us? the longest past is but a second in comparison. See!" he said, kissing her, "we have forgotten it already!"

Men may still find oblivion in a kiss, but women of fashion are always—or nearly always—too self-conscious to forget the artificialities of life in the verities of passion.

"Forgotten already?" repeated Lady Mallinger, moving away from him, "I wish it were. Do not be angry with me, but I must be alone a little. There are so many things to think about—so many things. Give me half an hour."

"So much?" said her lover.

"Have we not eternity before us?" she replied.

Wiche laughed, kissed both her hands, and went out on to the Terrace: he found it almost as delightful to obey her whims as to worship her beauty. Only the strong-minded can know the extreme pleasure

of self-surrender. Wiche's life had been so hard, so serious, and, in a sense, so wise until this too-enchanted present, that he seized its madness rather as a reward from the gods than a curse. He put all thought of the future from his mind—not because he feared it, but because it possessed no attraction for him. Lady Mallinger was an inexhaustible delight: egoism, which in any other woman seemed intolerable, was, in her case, the most charming thing in the world: selfishness, he argued, where the self was so perfectly bewitching even amounted to a duty: dull, tedious, and unpleasant beings did well to lose sight of themselves, but for Lilian to forget herself would be like a flower forgetting to bloom.

When Wiche had gone Lilian paced the floor and mistook this bodily exercise for deep thought. She was brought to a standstill by finding herself face to face with Teresa, who, not being able to quiet her soul, had returned in the hope of seeing Wiche once more.

“You look depressed,” she said to Lady Mallinger: “at luncheon you were all vivacity, epigram, and paradox. If you had not told me I should never have suspected that you considered it your vocation to play the fool!”

“Ah, I am much wiser since our conversation this morning,” said Lady Mallinger, “I am sure that the supreme happiness of a woman's life is to devote herself to the man who loves her: to be his friend, his ideal, his good angel!”

Teresa smiled bitterly. “And the supreme difficulty of a woman's life,” she said, “is to find the man who desires such devotion, who *has* an ideal, who

wants a good angel! The best of men only ask us to be for ever young and for ever pretty: let your conscience go to the dogs but keep your freshness. Virtue never yet atoned for wrinkles!"

"There I cannot agree with you," said Lady Mallinger. "I am sure that there is nothing so fascinating as sincerity! It is so uncommon. I am going to be the most sincere woman in the world, and I must begin by telling you that I was present just now during your conversation with Mr. Wiche."

"What conversation?" said Teresa.

"Let us both be sincere, dear Miss Warcop! I was sitting in that green chair when you mentioned my name. My first impulse was to rush forward: curiosity, however, intervened and I remained in my corner. Perhaps this was wrong, but my position was difficult: to begin with, I agreed perfectly with every word you said: you were only too charitable. I assured Mr. Wiche of this afterwards, but he would not believe me. When I told him that I had indeed neither mind, morals, heart, nor beauty, he looked so incredulous, and was so deaf to all argument that I despair of convincing him! Men are so prejudiced. What would you advise me to do?"

"This sarcasm does not cut!"

"Sarcasm!" cried Lilian, "I was never more candid, more natural, more absolutely transparent in my life. Why should I dissemble when I have found that you know me even better than I know myself?"

"This innocent air may deceive some infatuated man—for a time," said Teresa, "but I understand it too well. How can you dare to look so amiable when you know that you hate me. . . . You *must* hate me."

"Not at all: I think you are indiscreet and perhaps too impulsive, but, on the whole, I admire your character: it has a stability, a doggedness, a courage which mine lacks. I would never have the audacity, for instance, to discuss your faults with Sir Ventry. He would, I hope, be quite as blind with regard to you as my future husband is where I am concerned."

"Your future husband?" said Teresa.

"Yes," said Lady Mallinger. "Sidney was foolish enough to ask me to be his wife—at least, in so many words—and I was wise enough to accept him! If he will only trust me and believe in me always—if he will only see me—not as I am, but as I should be—I am sure we shall be happy!"

"It is not hard to be good when you have love and sympathy and encouragement," said Teresa, warmly, "but to be good when not one soul cares whether you live or die, when your kindest thoughts, your least selfish acts, your dearest sacrifices are treated alike with insult, cruelty, and contempt—to be good then, that is the great achievement. Stand alone, be indifferent to smiles and frowns, keep your eyes steadily fixed on one unattainable ideal and condemn in yourself all that falls short of it, do that and I will call you happy! Defy slander, defy the malice of evil tongues and false hearts, defy even one rule of etiquette!"

"No woman has anything to fear except the truth," said Lady Mallinger, "so long as the truth will bear telling, she can laugh at lies. They may for a time work mischief, but only for a time."

"I, too, could have such a faith in the triumph of virtue if I had such a lover as Sidney!" said Teresa,

"but live my life for a month and then tell me your philosophy !"

"You look cold," murmured Lillian, after a shiver and a slight pause.

"Cold ! I am always cold : feel my hand."

Lady Mallinger held it to her own pink cheeks. "You make me like you," she said ; "as a rule I do not care for women, and you are almost as spiteful as the rest. But there is something about you. . . . You believe me, when I say I like you ?"

"Yet you have robbed me of my one friend," cried Teresa, "you—you who have so much already. You are young and he thinks you are beautiful : I shall soon be old and I was always plain : many men have loved my money, but no one has ever loved *me*. In the Convent—I was brought up in a Convent—the sisters taught me how to live in Heaven : they forgot I had to get through the world first. My parents are dead and now I have nothing in this life except my wretched, hopeless interest in a man who has never given me a thought. Perhaps I need not say that. He is the only man I know who has not asked me to marry him, so I think he must like me a little. And he comes to see me very often. But you only care for him because he flatters you, you are proud of him because he is distinguished, but I was proud of him when he was poor and obscure, when every one thought him an outcast, when it was almost a crime in our miserable little corner of society to be seen even bowing to him. You do not understand him as I do : you cannot help him as I could : you play on all his weaknesses : every hour he spends with you will be a step backwards. Oh ! he is no hero in my eyes, no

passionless, faultless machine, but a Man. . . . Go ! tell him all I have said, laugh at me, pity me, say 'Poor woman ! That so plain and dull a creature should fall in love. How pathetic ! how ridiculous !'

Before Lilian could reply, Teresa rushed out of the room. Lady Mallinger rubbed her eyes : she, too, had once loved like this and she had been deceived. The mere remembrance of Saville drove all other thoughts from her mind : she forgot Wiche, she forgot Teresa, she forgot everything—the universe contained but two beings—herself and Rookes. Fate brought him to her at that critical moment.

"I have been for a stroll with Sir Ventry," he began awkwardly. "I—I am wretched. Are you still angry ?"

"I do not think we can have anything to say to each other, Saville," she said ; "the last words were spoken this morning. I could wish they had been kinder : I should like to remember that we parted, at least as friends. We were so much to each other once—once we thought it could never come to this. . . . Please leave me."

"No, I have been longing for a chance to speak to you ; now I have found it, you must listen. I will not attempt to defend myself—I——"

"You cannot : how could you ? You might perhaps say that you became desperate about your debts, and so—in a sort of madness—thought to marry Felicia for her money. You might say—ah, a thousand things, but they could make no difference. It is too late to think of them."

"Too late ?" said Rookes. "How can it be too late when you are there and I am here." He knelt

down by her side and, custom proving too strong for him, kissed her cheek. Custom was, perhaps, too strong for her also : at all events, she made no resistance. "You know my faults," he went on, "you could never have loved me for my perfection."

"I loved the man you might have been," she murmured, "not you at all." She glanced down and found her hand lying in his. "Not you at all," she repeated. "Besides . . . it really is too late. I—I have lost the right to listen to you."

VII.

IN the meantime Wiche's half-hour had come to an end. The clock was chiming five when he appeared at the drawing-room window. Rookes sprang to his feet : Lady Mallinger affected to laugh.

"My cousin is teasing me," she said ; "he will not let me tell him that I am really a very serious woman. He—he does not believe in me as you do !" As she spoke she touched Wiche's arm as though to assert her ownership. Neither of the men spoke : a footman entered and announced that tea was served on the lawn.

"We must go then," said Lilian. She led the way, but when she turned, she found that only Wiche had followed her.

"It is as well," she said, in her prettiest manner ; "we are happier by ourselves !" This was no doubt charming, and it may have been true. Wiche, however, was no less troubled by the fact than the possibility. Both were distracting, for, at that moment, he wished to overlook her fascination and think only of what was certain. And the one thing certain was, in his judgment, her love for Rookes. This truth—like all truths—had flashed upon him like a message from his guardian angel.

"Do not look so grave," said Lady Mallinger ; "we have been serious the whole afternoon, and now I want to rest ! Do you like me in pink ? Because

I have the loveliest pink satin which I am dying to wear this evening."

"How old are you?" he said, suddenly.

"Oh! My dear, dear Sidney! One can see that you have never made love before! How old am I? I forget: I was born so long ago. I must be at least twenty-two. Of course, I look even more, but then my life has been so unhappy. Now it will all be different, and perhaps I shall grow young again. You will be kind to me, will you not? And patient? And you will not expect to find me very good, and very truthful, and very quiet all at once. You will give me time? And you will not often be as cross as you are now, will you?" At length she saw it was useless to ignore the demon who sat between them. "It was not my fault," she said, "it really was not my fault. I told Saville I had lost the right to listen to him. And now you are blaming me. It is so hard that I must always be made miserable—even when I have made up my mind to be contented. I have tried my very best," she added, "to be happy this afternoon!"

"Was it such an effort?" said Wiche.

"All—all is an effort," she answered, "except folly. That seems the only easy, natural, and pleasant thing in the world!"

"What do you call folly?"

"Everything I want to do, everything I want to say, everything I care for—that is what I call folly."

"My dear," said Wiche, "you are in love. And Rookes is the man!"

"Tut! How little you know me! I admit that I am greatly attached to Saville—in spite of his faults,

but then I have known him so long ! But in love with him—never ! We are the dearest friends possible, and quarrel incessantly—but that is all ! ”

“ Are you sure ? ” said Wiche, “ are you sure that is all ? ”

She made no answer, but, soothing her lace which fluttered a little in the breeze, hummed without knowing it,

“ Virtue how frail it is !
Friendship how rare !
Love, how it sells poor bliss
For proud despair ! ”

“ That,” said Wiche, gravely, “ is what Rookes was singing last evening.”

“ Pity me,” she murmured.

“ Why ? ”

“ I adore him ! ”

While we exist we can never escape any stage of development ; if our infancy be prematurely wise, our years of discretion will have an inappropriate childishness. Lilian was living life backwards, and her sudden moods of immaturity which may have accounted for Rookes’s corresponding moods of fickleness, filled Wiche with dismay. Passion in these circumstances was impossible : affection became angelic, and sentiment lost all question of sex.

“ I adore Saville,” she repeated, and looked at Wiche with so beseeching an air, with such utter helplessness and irresponsibility that he wondered how he could ever have mistaken her for a woman. He still recognized her grace and beauty, but it roused in him the

same kind of emotion a man might feel on seeing the child of one he had loved deeply and who was dead. It was a sorrowful task to trace the resemblance: to note the likeness in line, and delicate tones and expression: to say to himself, "Lilian's mouth had that curve, her eyes were that colour, her throat was as white!"

"You must forget," he said, "you must forget—if you have not already forgotten—all that passed this afternoon. It was a great mistake."

It was a great mistake. Lady Mallinger brushed the echo of these words from her ear: she would not believe that they had ever been uttered. "This is what comes," she thought, "of telling a man the truth: he flies!"

"You may have made a mistake," she replied, "but I have said nothing to you which I could ever wish to unsay. Saville told me this morning that men may fall in love dozens of times, but that each experience is new. They can only love once one way. This is true of women also. And it all comes to this: love is precisely the same kind of emotion as religion. Oh, if we would only be as patient with human nature as God is! Some days we are more devout than others: the saint who appeals to you in one mood may repel you in another: this month we devote ourselves to Our Lady, and another to St. Paul; some people, too, mistake incense for dogma, and love of music for love of virtue. But the folly and sensuousness of creatures like myself cannot touch the great unalterable truths. I may never know them as they are, but they have been known. You will wonder what I am trying to tell you. It is hard to say: I

believe I mean that my adoration of Saville is not very serious ! ”

Wiche was a man who had learnt what he knew of human nature through self-discipline and not through self-abandon. Knowing therefore his own character and its possibilities so well, he was astonished to find that Lilian's was so like—subject, of course, to certain feminine modifications. He was acquainted with many men who could give an accurate appraisalment of each and all their impulses, thoughts, and emotions, who were such skilled self-analysts that they never by any chance confounded their soul with their body, or their conscience with either. He had never met a woman, however, who possessed this power even in a slight and half-unconscious degree ; he looked at Lilian and felt that while she had cured him of his fit of love, she had never seemed so deeply interesting as a fellow-creature.

“ My dear,” he said, “ you must surely see that we should be wretched if we married.”

“ Why ? ” said Lilian, “ it would be such a comfort to me to have some one I could really trust and believe in ; some one who would help me to be serious ; to know one being at least who was not led away by all manner of idle fancies ! ”

The irony of the situation would have been ludicrous if it had not been so heart-breaking.

“ Do not imagine that I am that one being,” said Wiche, hastily. “ God knows I am flimsy enough. And I am afraid it is always disastrous to pin one's faith to a mere mortal. Even the best of us are miserably imperfect as rocks of defence ; you see we are flesh-and-blood, we are not granite.”

"Treat me as though I had a mind, Sidney," she said, "and I will follow you to the ends of the earth!"

"I do not think," he stammered, "we could ever be happy together."

"You mean," said Lady Mallinger, "that you do not care for me in the way you thought."

"I will always be your friend," he said, firmly, "but——" Her sense of what was just and meet told her that it only remained now to call her soul into her eyes, gaze mournfully at Wiche, and leave him. Saville after all loved her the best.

Women like Lady Mallinger have to die young in order to be understood: then—and then not always—some onlooker more discerning than the others will see in the cold body some trace of a fiery spirit too ardent and too restless for mortality. Alas! poor soul. Seeking the highest, best, most beautiful, and purest—and finding a Saville Rookes.

The modern is always an unwilling slave to sentiment: if he find himself captivated by a romantic love or a sublime ideal he accepts his state in the shame-faced and hopeless certainty that his common-sense will one day come to the rescue. He cannot believe that what he takes for beauty will always be so fair, or that what seems good for the moment could be inspiring for ever. Satisfaction only makes him restless: he sighs for happiness and, having found it, sighs lest, after all, it should only be a shadow cast by his own desires. Wiche therefore suffered his disappointment with smiling patience and with something even of relief; once he had doubted that all was vanity, had suspected that life yet held much that was precious

and desirable, that love was an immortal fact, and endured. He felt now that he need struggle no longer against despair, and, abandoning himself to the intense pleasures of profound melancholy, became agreeably tired of existence. To his unspeakable resentment, however, one shining thought pierced the blackness of his thoughts. Teresa still remained. But she had never been his ideal. Teresa was Teresa—a vivid, distinct personality, a being whom no amount of romantic disguise could make seem other than she was, and who was incomparable, not because of her singular merits, but because no one else had the same faults.

VIII.

SIR VENTRY COXE had been educated in the belief that his cousin Teresa loved him madly. When he married Lady Susan Hoppe-Gardner, a chorus went up from all the members of his family. "What on earth will poor Teresa do?" She was present at the wedding, nevertheless, and seemed in the best possible spirits: the relations looked wise and murmured that it was impossible for the unhappy girl to deceive *them*. Ventry was particularly kind to her; he clasped her hand warmly when he started on his honeymoon and thanked her again and again with tears in his eyes, for her magnificent gift in the shape of a diamond necklace for his bride: every one said it was too touching for words, several ladies declared that Teresa grew as white as a sheet and would have swooned if Lord Twacorbie, with his ready tact, had not led her to the air.

A few years passed: Miss Warcop refused all offers; Lady Susan died. This, all the relations said, was Fate. Sir Ventry, remembering Teresa's rent-roll, thought so too. He decided to make her his wife when a decent period of mourning had elapsed; there was no hurry, she was there, ready, waiting, and willing, when he wanted her.

The day at last dawned when it seemed convenient to address her on the subject: he met her in the hall as she left the drawing-room after her scene with

Lady Mallinger. She was greatly embarrassed, a fact which he easily attributed to her sudden encounter with himself. Smiling magnanimously, he waited until she had regained her composure.

"Shall we go into the garden?" he suggested.

No, she was feeling rather tired; she had a slight headache; he would find her a very dull companion.

"Do come," he said, in his most persuasive manner.

Teresa, who was always amused at his conceit, and who had a motherly, pitying affection for the weaknesses which did duty for his character, yielded the point and followed him. He began to talk of former days: he reminded her of his five-and-twentieth birthday, when she gave him a hunter and wore a black cloak lined with scarlet.

"You look awfully well in scarlet," he observed. She blushed: scarlet was Wiche's favourite colour. Sir Ventry, however, took the blush to himself.

"I always admired you, you know," he said; "there is not a woman in the family who has got such a complexion, and your eyelashes are so long!"

"It is very nice of you to say so," said Teresa: "I, myself, do not think they are bad. Once or twice I have thought I looked quite decent!"

He glanced at her sideways. Was she really so plain as all the women made out?

"I am awfully fond of you," he said suddenly.

Teresa was by no means dense. "My dear Ventry," she said, with rather a nipping air, "let us talk like reasonable beings."

"I am quite serious," he replied. "Will you marry me, Teresa?"

"Certainly not. You must be mad."

"What?"

"You must be mad. And think yourself very lucky that I forgive you for making such an insulting suggestion." Trembling with anger she left him. He looked up to see whether the Heavens were falling.

IX.

TERESA sat alone in the drawing-room before dinner that evening. The lamps were lit and their hazy light fell on the orange velvet draperies, the vases of blue Sevres, the Chinese embroideries on scarlet satin, the copper bowls, the tiger skins and the Indian shawls. Teresa loved colour, gorgeous sunsets, the blare of trumpets, loud music—all that could send some note of the tremendous into the undramatic tragedy of her existence. To-night she wore a gown of silver brocade: lace concealed her neck, and long sleeves her arms, but neither brocade nor lace could hide the slight, almost angular figure of their wearer. She held a book of devotions in her lap, the leaves of which she turned at random, but her glance fell now on the clock, and now on the mirror—rarely on the volume and its grotesque old woodcuts of saints and ecstatic virgins. At last the sound of footsteps in the corridor without, and the opening of a door, marred the disquieting repose of her vigil. She let fall the book of prayers; the little crash it made on striking the floor and the rustle of her silk petticoat drowned the words of greeting which she addressed to Wiche, who now entered.

He chose a chair near hers, but she, half-unconsciously, shrank back. He was too engrossed in his own thoughts, however, to notice the movement.

“I fear I seemed most ungrateful this afternoon,”

he said, "but I felt quite sure that you would one day understand Lady Mallinger, and know, as I do, the real woman. Perhaps I should say the real child."

"When I spoke," said Teresa, in a low voice, "I did not know that you loved her. And she has charmed away my prejudice since then. I will frankly admit that I did not wish to discover anything bewitching either in her face or in her manner. I only wanted to have the right to detest her with a clear conscience!"

"Yet, in spite of all this, she conquered you?"

"She conquered me," repeated Teresa, "but let me say one thing—she is too romantic: she lives by moonlight."

Wiche laughed. "She has seen a great deal of the world," he said, "and I have often been struck by her extraordinary, almost terrible common-sense. She may have a certain amount of sentimentalism in her brain, but at heart she is cold and critical. This ache to be amused, this longing to hear music in the air, to see beauty on all sides, to find life one ever-new, yet ever-abiding pleasure, these are the fierce, never-gratified desires of those who love only themselves. But to him who loves others—even one other"—he found himself looking into Teresa's eyes—"even one other—the commonest things seem rare, the blackest shadows have a radiance indescribable, and the harshest notes are heavenly melodies: disappointment, bitterness, and desolation have no part in his existence!"

"These exalted moods are brief—terribly brief," said Teresa, "and they show us just enough of our lost divinity to make us ever more wretched as mere

mortals and children of Adam. It is the day after, the days after, the weeks, months, years after when we can only remember that once we were happy for half-an-hour!" She seemed to have forgotten Wiche's presence, and he felt that she was thinking of something in her own experience in which he bore no part. It was certain that she could have no knowledge of his love-adventure with Lady Mallinger, and he could not make up his mind to tell the news just then.

"I wonder," he said, abruptly, "I have often wondered why you are the only one in the world I can talk to without the dread of saying either more or less than I mean."

"I will tell you why," she answered: "I could never misunderstand you, Sidney, because I love you." Although she was a woman in whom the coquette was, at all events, slumbering, her primmest, least emotional manner had the mysterious charm of those things which we note unmoved and remember with passionate interest. She made her declaration of love so quietly that Wiche saw neither its oddness, nor, indeed, its full meaning: he coloured a little, however, at the sense her words might have conveyed.

"Do not think I am choosing phrases at random," she went on, "I meant what I said. There is only one thing in my life which I can be grateful for—that is my love for yourself. Many people would think it very unwomanly on my part to tell you this: I am only proud to know that I am capable of loving any one. All affection seems to have been laughed out of the world: when it is not ridiculous, it is thought hysterical. To me it remains and always

must remain, the greatest—the only perfect gift—that God has given us. So I have told you.” Her lips trembled a little as she added, “I suppose, too, you have heard it already from Lady Mallinger?”

“What could I hear from Lady Mallinger,” he asked, growing more and more bewildered. Teresa’s expression was so frigid though her words were so kind. “I am sure we are talking at cross purposes.”

“Do you mean to say,” she stammered, “that she never told you all—all I said to her this afternoon?”

“She has never uttered your name.”

Teresa hid her face in her hands and forced back her tears. She had needlessly betrayed her secret.

“I will explain,” she said, at last. “Lady Mallinger told me this afternoon that she was going to marry you: we had some words and I—I confessed quite plainly what I—I said just now. And I thought she would surely repeat it—so—in order to avoid any misapprehension—I decided to let you hear it from me also. It needed courage, but now all my courage has gone—I had only enough for that. It wanted so much. Do not say a word: please go.”

“Lady Mallinger is not going to marry me,” he said, quietly.

He touched Teresa’s hand, and conquered his impulse to kiss it: that was not the moment, nor indeed could he imagine a time when it might be the moment. She seemed to stand in an enchanted circle. Suddenly, he saw that she was crying. This touch of weakness seemed to supply the one thing he had always missed in her character. Teresa had, as a rule, a self-command which was almost forbidding—even her occasional indis-

cretions had something well-considered and reasonable. She lacked that inconsequence, that capriciousness, that delicious nonsense which most men and all strong natures find so alluring and adorable. To see her weeping, therefore, was to behold a new creature. Wiche was uncertain how to reply, when she herself, brushing the tears from her cheeks, asked him a question.

"Why?" she said, "why are you not going to marry Lady Mallinger?"

"I want to tell you about that," he said. "I am afraid there is not time to tell the whole story now. But Lady Mallinger discovered that she had made a mistake, she loved some one else, and I—I have been such a fool, Teresa, such a fool! I do not know whether I love you or not. I only know that I hate my life when you are not near me!" This truth, which had been sleeping so long, woke at the first whisper of its name: he realized how pitifully little would remain to him if Teresa were taken from his memory: it was her very oneness with his own mind which had made him overlook her: when he imagined that he was thinking of himself he was thinking of Teresa also.

"I only know," he said once more, "that I hate my life when you are not near me!"

She could have wished that he had expressed himself with less egoism; if he cared for her at all it was because she was necessary to his peace of soul: at least, so it sounded. But she was a woman who found her happiness in giving and loving: she made no demands; she looked neither for gratitude, nor homage, nor appreciation; she only asked the right

to give and to love. So she gave Wiche her hand; her heart had been his from the beginning.

"Without you," she said, "I have no life to hate!"

This may have been weak, but Teresa was not strong-minded. And perhaps it is as well for those of us who are proud and self-reliant that just such simple, undignified, and affectionate creatures are to be found here and there. They may speak for us on Judgment Day, which will be the longest, darkest, and coldest, this world has seen.

X.

WHICH CONTAINS A LETTER WRITTEN THE SAME
EVENING BY LADY TWACORBIE TO HER
HUSBAND.

“ARDEN LODGE,

“NEAR WENSLEY,

“MERTFORD.

“MY DEAR HAROLD,—I am so annoyed and disgusted that I can scarcely hold my pen. Wiche has proposed to *Teresa*, and has been accepted. What could be more outrageous than such conduct? As for *Teresa*, you know I always thought her dreadfully sly. How any woman could prefer Wiche to Ventry! But there, what on earth does Wiche see in *Teresa*? Van Huyster told me in the course of conversation at dinner that he is engaged to some American person in Paris, and that he hopes to persuade her to marry him on the *Fourth of July*. We must really be more careful in future about whom we invite to the house. *Lilian* and *Rookes* are flirting in the most unexpected manner. I thought they could not *bear* each other. *Nothing*, however, would astonish me in that direction after the surprises of this day. I believe that I am the only sane person in the house. Thank goodness, they all go to-morrow. I long for rest. *Felicia* seems hysterical; I never knew a girl of seventeen

with so many nerves. She must go on with that steel tonic, and take fencing lessons.

“Your affectionate wife,

“CHARLOTTE TWACORBIE.

“P.S.—Spalding has just been in to say that he and Danby wish to get married this day month! What could be more tiresome? I begged him to reconsider it, but he said it was too late. He had made up his mind.

“P.S. No. 2.—Ventry has given me to understand that he proposed to Teresa this afternoon, and that she seemed quite annoyed. He is furious, and blames ME. I dare not tell him about Wiche.”

EPILOGUE.

*Spoken by a Daughter of Eve, who is weeping, and an
Angel, who looks out of fashion.*

THE ANGEL.

This is only sorrow
For To-Day.
Life begins To-Morrow !

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

So they say.

THE ANGEL.

Life with love and laughter
Gay and free—
Yet no heartache after.

A DAUGHTER OF EVE

Can it be ?

THE ANGEL.

Life with work that reaches
To the sky ;
Life that never teaches
How to die.
Life that is eternal,
Ever young,

Ever bright and vernal
Just begun !

A DAUGHTER OF EVE.

Will To-Morrow ever dawn ?
Shall we wake that golden morn
But to see
All the treasures gained by tears,
All the faith that's won by fears—
Vanity ?

THE ANGEL.

Doubter, look behind thee
In the past,
All the dreams that pleased thee
Did one last ?
Is a wish remaining
From thy youth ?
This thou art retaining
If 'twas truth.
Mortal passions sicken,
Fade away—
Love alone can quicken
Earthly clay.
Faith, and all endeavour
That is pure,
Hope, and Love, for ever
These endure.
All things else are folly
To the wise,—
Quit thy melancholy
And thy sighs !

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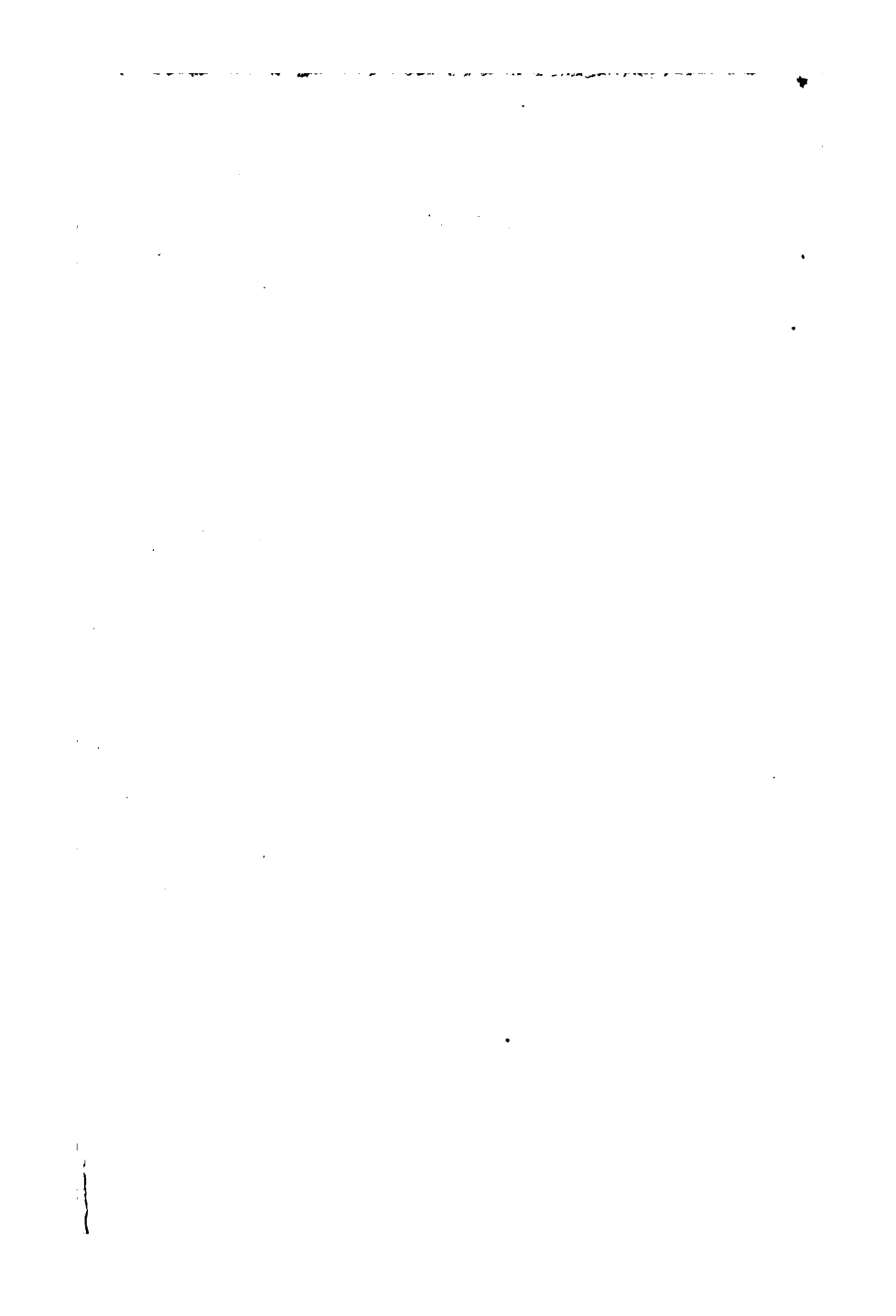
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